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THE
SEMI-DETACHED HOUSE.



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THE

SEMI-DETACHED HOUSE.

EDITED BY

LADY THERESA LEWIS.

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THE
SEMI-DETACHED HOUSE.

CHAPTER I.

“THE only fault of the house is, that it is semi-detached.”

“Oh, Aunt Sarah! you don't mean that you expect me to live in a semi-detached house?”

“Why not, my dear, if it suits you in other respects?”

“Why, because I should hate my semi-detachment, or whatever the occupants of the other half of the house may call themselves.”

“They call themselves Hopkinson,” continued Aunt Sarah, coolly.

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“I knew it,” said Blanche, triumphantly, “I felt certain their names would be either Tomkinson or Hopkinson—I was not sure which—but I thought the chances were in favour of Hop rather than Tom.”

Aunt Sarah did not smile, but drew the mesh out of her netting and began a fresh row.

“Go on, Aunt Sarah,” said Blanche demurely.

“I am going on, thank you, my dear, very nicely; I expect to finish this net this week.” Blanche looked at her Aunt to ascertain if she looked angry, or piqued, or affronted; but Aunt Sarah’s countenance was totally incapable of any expression but that of imperturbable stolid sense and good-humour. She did not care for Blanche’s little vivacities.

“Do you know the Hopkinsons, Aunt Sarah?”

“No, my dear.”

“Nor their history, nor their number, nor their habits? Recollect, Aunt Sarah, they

will be under the same roof with your own pet Blanche.”

“I have several pets, my dear—Tray, and Poll, and your sister, and—”

“Well, but she will be there, too, for I suppose the Lees will let Aileen come to me, now that I am to be deserted by Arthur,” and Blanche’s voice quivered, but she determined to brave it through. “Did you see any of the Hopkinsons when you went to look at the house?”

“Yes, they went in at their door just as I went in at yours. The mother, as I suppose, and two daughters, and a little boy.”

“Oh dear me! a little boy, who will always be throwing stones at the palings, and making me jump; daughters who will always be playing ‘*Partant pour la Syrie* ;’ and the mother—”

“Well, what will she do to offend your Highness?”

“She will be immensely fat, wear mittens—thick, heavy mittens, and contrive to know what I have for dinner every day.”

There was a silence, another row of netting and a turn of the mesh, and then Aunt Sarah said in her most composed tone :

“I often think, my dear, that it is a great pity you are so imaginative, and a still greater pity that you are so fastidious. You would be happier if you were as dull and as matter-of-fact as I am.”

“Dear Aunt Sarah, don't say you are dull. There is nobody I like so much to talk to. You bring out such original remarks, such convincing truths, and in a quiet way, so that they do not make the black bruises which '*les vérités dures*' generally produce. But *am* I fastidious and imaginative?”

“Yes, my dear, very painfully so. Now, just consider, Blanche ; you began this week by throwing yourself into a fever because Arthur was to leave you, on a mission that may be of great future advantage to him. He is to be away only three months, and is as much grieved as you are at the separation it involves. You immediately assert that he is going for a year, at least, that he is to

forget you instantly, and fall in love with any and every other woman he sees.”

“No, only with that woman with the unpronounceable name that he used to dance with; a very dangerous woman, Aunt Sarah.”

“That he is to be smashed in the railroad to Folkestone, drowned off Antwerp, and finally die of a fever at Berlin; and that in the meanwhile, you are to have a dead child immediately, twins soon after, a very bad confinement, besides dying of consumption, and various other maladies,” pursued Aunt Sarah, in her steadiest tone. “Now, if those are not vain imaginings, Blanche, I do not know what are.”

“They sound plausible, though; and, I assure you, Aunt, I did not imagine them; they suggested themselves, and they look very like the ordinary facts of life. However, I grant it is a bad habit to look forward to evils that may not occur; but then, you know, I am ill. I never had these grey thoughts, when I was strong, and Arthur’s going away has turned

them all black—and now as to my fastidiousness.”

“You always were fastidious, my child, easily jarred by the slightest want of tact and refinement, and I am not much surprised,” added Aunt Sarah, as she looked fondly at her niece. There was something startling in the mobility of Blanche’s beautiful features, every thought that passed through her mind might be read in her kindling eyes and expressive lips ; she looked too ethereal for contact with the vulgar ills of life.

“I will allow you have some right to be fastidious, darling ; and it is only because it interferes with your comfort, that I object to it. But you cannot go and stay with Lord Chesterton, because he calls you “Blanket,” and thinks it a good joke ; nor with your sister-in-law, Lady Elinor, because Sir William is fond of money, and you foresee he will say that you cost him at least seventeen shillings and fourpence a day ; nor with your Aunt Carey, because the doctor who would attend you wears creaking boots, and calls you

my Lady ; and now you object to a house that all your friends and your doctor recommend, because it is possible that your next door neighbour may play on the piano-forte and wear black mittens. Dear Blanche, this is what I call over-fastidiousness ; and now I have finished my ten rows, and said all the disagreeable things I could think of, so I will go, and leave you to think how officious and particular old Aunt Sarah is.”

“ You know I shall think no such thing,” said Blanche, half crying and half laughing, “ but you must own, Aunt Sarah, that when you string all my fancies together, they are rather amusing--wrong, if you please, but amusing. However, I will try to reform, and if Arthur likes Pleasance, which he is gone to see, and if Dr. Ayscough persists in driving me out of London, I will establish myself in my semi-detached villa, and try to get into the Hopkinson set.”

It may be inferred from the above conversation, that Blanche was slightly spoiled, but she was charming, nevertheless—sweet-tem-

pered and playful, and with high spirits, now subdued by the approaching separation from her husband, to whom she had been married only six months. They were as foolishly in love as all young couples are, or ought to be, and Lord Chester would willingly have declined the offer to join a special mission to Berlin, which had been made to him. Blanche could not conceive it possible that he should leave her in her very interesting state of health. Dr. Ayscough treated the notion of her being able to accompany her husband with the politest and most magnificent contempt; and it seemed likely that the great national interests of Great Britain and Prussia would actually lose all the light, which Arthur might throw upon them in the capacity of Secretary to a special mission. But old fathers see these matters in a different point of view from young sons. Lord Chesterton came fussing up to town full of admiration for Her Majesty's Government in general, and for the Foreign Office in particular; he must own he thought Clarendon very judicious in

his diplomatic appointments, he might say very discriminative. And he was so profuse in his felicitations to Arthur on his appointment, and in his compliments to dear little Blanche, on her wisdom in letting her husband go without her—that neither of them had courage to say that they meant to decline the offer. And so it came to pass that Arthur was to go to Berlin, and Blanche to Pleasance. Dr. Ayscough wished her to leave London, but still to be within reach of his surveillance; and Blanche, who had been under his care from the day of her birth, and who was delicate at all times, never supposed for a moment that his advice was not to be followed implicitly.

He went down with Arthur to look at Pleasance, they both approved of it, and when, soon after Aunt Sarah's departure, Arthur bounded upstairs, and declared that he had actually taken the prettiest villa in the world for his little Blanche, she warmed up to the idea. She made one faint inquiry as to whether he had seen her next door neighbours. At first he denied their existence,

but finally owned that there was a small house at the back of her's. "But that does not signify; yours is a good large house and such drawing rooms, and such a conservatory, and a splendid lawn down to the river; and there is a wall and a laurel hedge, and all sorts of conundrums to shut out these neighbours who seem to alarm you."

"Their name is Hopkinson, Arthur."

"And a very good name, too. Hopkinson was the name of the Captain of the 'Alert,' who took me out to the Cape, and an excellent fellow he was; perhaps you would have thought him vulgar, but he helped me through a bad fever, which made rare havoc on board; and Florence Nightingale herself could not have made a better nurse. I like the name of Hopkinson."

"Oh well!" said Blanche, "then it will all do very well, and I must write to Aunt Sarah, and tell her we have taken her Semi-Detached House. It is quite within reach of her daily drive."

CHAPTER II.

“HERE is poor Willis coming to see us,” said Mrs. Hopkinson from her commanding position in the window, to her two girls who were drawing and reading at the secluded end of the room. The girls looked at each other with a slight expression of dismay. Willis was not a favourite; he had married their step-sister, and it was thought a great thing for the Hopkinsons, when Mr. Willis of Columbia House, which boasted of a lodge and an entrance drive, a shrubbery and a paddock, and a two-stalled stable, and every sort of suburban magnificence, married pretty Mary Smith, who lived merely at No. 2, without a shilling of her own, and dependant

on her step-father for a home. So when she became Mrs. Willis of Columbia House, and of Fenchurch Street, where Mr. Willis duly transacted some mysterious business, that appeared to produce a large return of profit, the Hopkinsons thought her a very fortunate young woman, and so she thought herself, till she found out that she had married a man who was by profession a grumbler. He had a passion for being a victim; when he was single, he grumbled for a wife, and when he had found a wife, he grumbled for the comforts of a bachelor. He grumbled for an heir to Columbia Lodge, and when the heir was born he grumbled because the child was frail and sickly. In short, he fairly grumbled poor gentle Mrs. Willis out of the world, and then grumbled at her for dying. But still her death was a gain to him. He took up the high bereaved line, was at all hours and in all societies the disconsolate mourner, wore a permanent crape round his hat, a rusty black coat in the city, and a shining one when he dined out. He professed

himself "serious," and proved it by snubbing his friends when they were prosperous, and steadily declining to take the slightest interest in their adversities.

"What were their trials compared to his? A lonely man—ah! poor Mary! don't talk to him of losses indeed!" Certainly, though he might be the very good man he said he was, he was not an agreeable companion. His sisters-in-law were strong in that opinion. Mrs. Hopkinson took him at his own valuation, always called him "poor Willis" from respect to Mary's memory, and relieved him of the care of his sick child, which enabled him to sigh over the sacrifice he had made of his lost angel's legacy to her bereaved mother.

"I wonder what poor Willis will say, girls, when he hears that Pleasance is let?"

"Something very unpleasant, mamma," answered Janet.

"Oh, my dears, you are hard upon poor Willis! I am sure when I think of my dear Mary (what a wife she was to be sure!) I

quite respect her dear husband's melancholy face and heavy sighs."

"But, mamma, don't you remember just after Mary had accepted him, and he came to ask for your consent, you said that he looked so gloomy, and sighed so deeply, that it was more like consenting to a funeral than a wedding?"

"Did I?" said Mrs. Hopkinson, trying not to laugh. "Well, he never was much in the cheerful line; but don't talk of it, for here he is. Well, Willis, Charlie is a little better to-day; and only think, Pleasance is let!"

"Of course it is," answered a sepulchral voice.

"Well, it *is* a sweet place! one can't wonder at anybody taking it; but it has stood empty a long time."

"That I don't care about, that is Randall's loss; but as I liked to smoke my cigar there in peace, and to take my lonely stroll by the river side, and as it suited my child to play in the garden—in short, as it was a sort of con-

solution to *me*—of course, somebody else went and took it, that's all!"

Janet and Rose tried to catch their mother's eye, but she was looking compassionately at Willis, the exile of Pleasance.

"It is a Lord Something who has taken it. Mercy me, what a head I have, I remember nothing! What was his name? It was one of our great towns, Lord Leeds, Lord York, Lord Birmingham—could it be either of those?"

"As there are no such people I should think not. I do wish, Mrs. H., I could persuade you to read the 'Peerage' a little more, these blunders annoy me."

"Law, Willis, you'll be a conjuror if you persuade me to read it at all. You might as well ask me to read a list of Red Morocco Chiefs," (Mrs. Hopkinson somehow fancied that morocco was bright scarlet). "I am just as likely to see them as all those peers you are always studying."

"My studies are of a far more serious class," he said, tartly, "the 'Peerage' is not

of much use to a broken heart. But I see nothing to be proud of in ignorance on any subject!"

Mrs. Hopkinson was in a reverie. "Chester!" she said at last, with a start that immediately threw Mr. Willis into an attitude indicative of a nervous headache, "Lord Chester, that was the name!"

"Viscount Chester, son of the Earl of Chesterton, married last year to Blanche, daughter of the Honourable W. Grenville. I met them this spring at the Lord Mayor's dinner. More frivolous specimens of fashion you could hardly see, all jewels, and laughter, and levity. Oh vanity of vanities!"

"Oh fun of fun!" exclaimed Rose. "A nice gay young couple. How glad I am! I daresay they will give parties and breakfasts, and there will be carriages continually down the lane, perhaps a band sometimes on the lawn. It will put you quite in spirits, Charles," she added, with a demure look.

He leant his head on his hands with a look of acute suffering.

“Got the headache, Charles?”

“One ache more or less makes little difference to me. I ought to have the headache. Have none of you found out who owns that dreadful macaw? It has been screaming all day.”

Now it is a remarkable fact in natural history, that in all the suburbs of London, consisting of detached houses, called by auctioneers ‘small and elegant’ or of Terraces described as first-rate dwellings, there always is an invisible macaw, whose screaming keeps the hamlet or terrace in a constant state of irritation. Nobody owns to having one, and detection is impossible, for at Dulham, as at all the suburban villages, the inhabitants lived by, and for, and with London. The men went daily to their offices or counting-houses, and the women depended for society on long morning visits from London friends and relations; and they did not, as they observed with much pride, “visit at Dulham.” So the macaw screeched on, and as his noise seemed to come from fifty houses at

once, every body suspected every body of keeping this plumed atrocity. No. 3 sent to No. 5 to beg that the bird might be shut up for a few days, as No. 3's baby did nothing but start, and would not wean. No. 3's messenger met No. 5's maid-of-all-work, coming with a bold request that the macaw might be sent away, as "Misuss's mother-in-law was subject to bad headaches, and was driv half mad." As neither of the parties owned even a linnet, in the way of bird, the nuisance was not abated by this negotiation.

At one time there seemed to be a hope that the mystery was discovered. A singular looking old lady walked into church with a bunch of parrot's feathers in her bonnet. There was a general nudging of elbows through the church and a low murmur of "macaw." The lady was looked upon with such abhorrence, that nobody would offer her a seat, and as for a hymn book or a hassock, money would not have procured them for her. The poor old

thing might have fainted away in the aisle, if the pew-opener had not sacrificed to her, her own three-legged stool. It turned out afterwards that she was quite a stranger in the place, and had mistaken the very humdrum Mr. Bosville for the popular preacher of that name, who officiated at a church five miles off. As she was stone deaf, she went away charmed with the sermon. And the macaw screamed on anonymously.

He was a treasure to Mr. Willis ; it was a daily and hourly grievance, and he made the most of it. This morning, after several splendid sighs, he withdrew with a cursory look at his child and a hoarse ejaculation, " Poor little sufferer !" but in the afternoon, when the girls were out walking, Mrs. Hopkinson was surprised to see him return, his black coat buttoned up to the very top button, not a streak of white visible. This always portended a stern visit and much good advice.

" Look, ma'am, look there !" and he pre-

sented her with a weekly paper of a disreputable character.

“Law my dear ‘the Weekly Lyre,’ thank you, I never read any of those abominable papers. Do carry it away for fear the girls should see it.”

“For the sake of the girls, ma’am, you must read the paragraph I have marked.”

Mrs. Hopkinson was half inclined to put on her gloves, before she touched what she looked upon as poison. She had a pair of hideous dark green gauntlets, that seemed made to encounter the ‘Weekly Lyre.’ A broad black border, the work of Willis, encircled the following paragraph:—

“Fracas in High Life.—It is our melancholy duty to report the separation of a young and noble couple, whose appearance at the altar of Hymen we detailed some months ago. Whether the levity of the lady, or the temper of the gentleman has brought about this dénouement we are unable to say. Rumours of all sorts are rife—a foreign court, and a villa not one hundred miles from London

are the scenes of several piquant anecdotes. Whether the last is tenanted by his Lordship's wife, or his *chère amie*, we forbear to say."

"Well, ma'am, what do you say to that?" asked Willis, folding his arms, and looking as like John Kemble as was feasible.

"Well, my dear, it is not much worse than paragraphs I have read in the most decent papers—I have seen things like that in the 'Illustrated.' It is odd that the nobility will have 'Fracaws, and *chère amies*, and picking anecdotes,' but I suppose in our class of life, we have the same things, only with English names. Not that John and I ever had a fracaw, thank goodness; but I am much obliged to you, Willis, for the loan of the paper, and perhaps you had better put it in your pocket, for fear the girls should come home."

"But don't you see, ma'am, what it means? Was not Lord Chester's marriage announced in this very paper six months ago? Isn't he going to a foreign court? and hasn't he taken a villa not one hundred miles from London—

and is not a lady whose name is unknown, coming to live in it? A nice neighbour for you, Mrs. Hopkinson."

"Oh, gracious goodness, Willis, you don't mean to say that Lord Chester is going to establish his mistress next door, and our back staircase looking on the lawn—in Dulham too! Such a quiet proper place! Let me have another look at that dreadful paper! It must be so. What shall I do?"

"Bear the misfortune, ma'am—cheerfully as I do. Luckily my house is half a mile off."

"And we are under the very roof of Pleasance. I'll have the shutters of that staircase window shut and barred at once; the house will be as dark as pitch, but that can't be helped. Good bye, Willis, I must be off to take my precautions. This is a business!"

Willis carried off his paper with something that would have been a smile if he had not been Willis, and Mrs. Hopkinson set to work to throw up her fortifications against the vices of the nobility.

In justice to the 'London Lyre,' it may be added that the paragraph in question had no reference whatever to Lord and Lady Chester, nor to any other Lord and Lady in Her Majesty's dominions, it was a stock paragraph inserted occasionally, and with variations, when the editor was distressed for news.

CHAPTER III.

ARTHUR was gone. He brought his wife to Pleasance and passed one day there with her, in order that he might fancy her way of life while he was absent ; and then departed, having promised positively not to dance with Madame von Moerkerke.

“I will not as you make a point of it ; but I cannot think why you are jealous of that yea and nay woman, who has but the one merit of being well dressed.”

“Oh, Arthur dear, remember that ball at L—— House, where you devoted yourself to her, and never spoke to me at all.”

“Of course I did not, for remember the morning of that day, when you let that fellow

Hilton ride by your side for two hours, and talked to him all through dinner. I made a vow never to speak to you again, and by the help of the angelic Moerkerke, kept it for a whole evening. The next day, you know, I was obliged to break it, in order to tell you I could not live without you."

Blanche felt the glow these words gave her, even when Arthur had left her, but still he was gone. She cried herself to sleep, and cried when she woke, and cried when Aileen arrived; and then Dr. Ayscough drove down, and gave her a regular scolding, and assured her she would destroy her health and her hopes, if she behaved so foolishly, and that he could see nothing to cry about. Mrs. Ayscough had been in Wales with her mother all the summer, and he did not go about sobbing to all his patients; and he told Aileen to have a sofa placed out on the lawn and make her sister pass the afternoon in the open air. Then Arthur's fond letter came, and after that matters mended considerably. There was the house to shew to Aileen, and the garden to

investigate, and all sorts of red and gold barges came careering up the river, with well-dressed people, looking slightly idiotical as they danced furiously in the hot sun. Aunt Sarah and one or two intimate friends drove down, and envied Blanche her shady trees and cool river, and even insinuated that Arthur was very lucky to have obtained such a good appointment. But there Blanche drew her line, she steadily refused that comfort. She had several visitors the first week, and Dulham Lane was, as Janet and Rose had hoped, much enlivened thereby.

But Mrs. Hopkinson sat with her broad back to the window, pertinaciously declining to look at all the wickedness on wheels that was rolling by her door. She had found that the plan of shutting her shutters would probably end in a fall down her narrow staircase, so she had told her girls not to look out of the window, that poor Willis had reason to believe that the people next door were not at all creditable; and as Janet and Rose were singularly innocent in the ways of the world,

and were always desirous to thwart Willis, and as they were particularly anxious to know whether flounces or double skirts were the prevailing fashion, they resented this exclusion from their only point of observation. Charlie missed his airings in the garden, and altogether the advent of Lady Chester had thrown a gloom over the Hopkinson circle.

When Sunday arrived, a fresh grievance occurred. The Hopkinsons had been allowed to make use of the pew belonging to Pleasance, and that was now occupied by Lady Chester and her sister. The slight bustle occasioned by the attempt to find a seat for Mrs. Hopkinson, who was of large dimensions, caused Blanche to look up, and with natural good breeding, she opened her pew door, and beckoned to that lady to come in. She did so, and what with the heat of the day, the thought of what Willis would say, when he saw her sitting next to a lady of doubtful character, who had made a "fracaw in high life," she could hardly breathe. She enclosed herself in a palisade of hymn books and prayer

books, sat close to the pew door, ready to burst through it at the slightest appearance of levity on the part of her companions, and it was only by dint of much fanning that she was enabled to sit through the service. She disappeared at the close of it before the sisters had finished their devotions.

“That poor woman seemed to feel the heat of the weather dreadfully,” said Aileen.

“Yes, and I felt the heat of the poor woman, did not you? It was like having a stove put into the pew; but I am glad we were able to give her a seat, she looked troubled in mind. What a good sermon it was, I think we ought to make acquaintance with the clergyman, but I do not know how to set about it.”

“I mean to go to the school,” said Aileen, “and I suppose he takes charge of that,” and so the sisters sauntered home. Mrs. Hopkinson had in the meantime hurried to rejoin her daughters and Willis, who had found places in the gallery. She could hardly wait till they were out of the church, before she

began. "Oh, dear me! I wish I had toiled up to the gallery with you, girls; Willis, where *do* you think I got a seat?"

"On one of the tombs, ma'am?" he gloomily asked.

"No, my dear, in the Pleasance pew actually in the same pew with one of those shocking women who made the fracaw. I never was so uncomfortable, and they are so pretty, and what is odd, they were so attentive to the service, never took their eyes off their prayer books, and they look so young to be so wicked."

"I forgot to tell you that my paper must have made a mistake," said Mr. Willis in his slowest and most complacent tone, "I saw the real Lady Chester and her sister drive by last Thursday and turn into the gate; fine horses she drives."

"And you have known it was the wife ever since Thursday?" said Mrs. Hopkinson, stopping short in her toilsome walk, and facing her son-in-law, "and never told me; and there was I, actually in church, fancying

all sorts of shocking things about those pretty young creatures, and all because of you and your 'Weekly Lyre.' If you bring that vile paper into the house, I will put it into the fire, I will, depend upon it," and she looked as if it were just possible that she might wrap Willis up in the paper before the conflagration commenced. He was almost frightened, his mother-in-law so seldom turned upon him.

"I did not know you cared about it; indeed it rather surprises *me*, who can no longer take any interest in life, to see you so excited, and all for a woman who has separated herself from her husband."

"But we do not know that she has, it is only your paper that says so; and, indeed, if she has, it is probably Lord Chester's fault. I have always observed that when man and wife part, the husband is a brute. And to think how I behaved, puffing and blowing, and going off at last without even saying thank you, and all on account of the 'Weekly Lyre.'" The warm-hearted woman was really vexed, the more so, that she did not

see how any *amende* was to be made. However, chance befriended her.

Lady Chester was quite knocked up by the morning's exertion, so Aileen went alone to the afternoon service, and found her fat friend of the morning coming out of the adjoining house, accompanied by her slim daughters. They arrived at the church door together, and then Aileen said, "If you are not provided with a seat, my sister is not coming to church, and there will be room in our pew for all your party." She was surprised to see the difference in Mrs. Hopkinson's appearance since the morning. Her good-humoured face had its usual benevolent look ; she was actually cool, though the thermometer was some degrees higher than it had been, and her thanks were so cordial, that Aileen felt pleased to find her little civility so much valued.

"Who do you think that lady was who sat with us this morning?" Aileen said, as she rejoined Blanche on the lawn.

"How can I possibly guess, dear? Somebody evidently perturbed in mind, and very

uncomfortable in body ; but I have not an idea who she is."

"Neighbour Hopkinson," said Aileen quietly.

"You don't say so ! now do write a line to Aunt Sarah forthwith, and beg her to come and see my Semi-detachment, and judge for herself if I am imaginative. I said Mrs. Hopkinson would be immensely fat, and so she is ; you did not happen to see if she wore mittens, did you Aileen?"

"I did not observe what she wore this evening ; but I have a faint idea of a mitten holding a fan, in the morning."

"No, have you?" said Blanche joyfully. "Tell Aunt Sarah to come early, and for the whole day at least ! there are two of my imaginings verified, and perhaps the girls will begin practising '*Partant pour la Syrie*' to-morrow."

"They are nice looking girls," said Aileen, "and I do not think you would have thought the mother so fat this afternoon ; and she looked so placid, I cannot think why she was

so fussy in the morning; however, it is no business of ours, and now Blanche, come in, the dew is falling."

Aunt Sarah arrived, and admitting the facts of size and mittens, suggested that they could in no way affect Blanche's daily comfort. While she was sitting by the river side with her nieces, a boat drew to the landing place, and Edwin Grenville's joyous voice hailed his sisters—"Can you give us some luncheon, Blanche? we are starving and tired."

"Then pray come and eat; but who are *'we?'*"

"Harcourt, and Grey, and Hilton."

"Hilton," whispered Blanche, "Oh, Aunt Sarah, I wish Edwin would not bring him here, Arthur will be so angry."

"I cannot see why," said Aileen, hastily, and colouring up to the eyes.

"You are both much too young to receive morning visits from Edwin's brother officers," said Aunt Sarah, "and so I shall tell him; and I can safely undertake to make myself

so unpleasant to his friends that they will be glad to go away again."

But there Aunt Sarah was signally mistaken. All her pithy remarks and sensible snubs were received by the young men as excellent jokes, and when they finally went away, Harcourt observed to Grey that "My Aunt was a jolly old fellow," and that he hoped she would be there next time they went. However, Blanche took the opportunity when Aileen was walking by the river side with three of the gentlemen, to tell her brother, that though it had been a very pleasant party, and though she was always glad to see *him*, yet, perhaps, he had better not bring his friends again. Arthur might not like it, he had rather a prejudice against Colonel Hilton.

"Oh, nonsense, Blanche! you must cure Arthur of prejudice; and the best of it is, that it was Hilton who proposed our landing here."

"Ah, that's just it," said Blanche.

"Just what?" said Edwin. "Why, Blanche,

I thought the great good of your being married, was, that you became a staid, sober chaperone for Aileen."

"Well, I am very staid, and quite sober and steady, as you would say of your groom; but you know I am only eighteen, Edwin, and Arthur is away, and all circumstances considered, you had better come alone."

"Well! I never heard such nonsense; did you, Aunt Sarah?"

"No, my dear, I think it is excellent sense, quite refreshing. I could have said nothing better myself, and as the tide has turned, you may as well go. Good-bye, Edwin, you have been lucky in your tides to-day, generally they seem to me to run the wrong way. Aileen, bid your friends good-bye, for we are going in, Blanche is tired."

And so they all dispersed, and Blanche said to her sister, "I am glad Aunt Sarah was here, I shall tell Arthur how it was, and that I had nothing to do with Colonel Hilton's coming here. The next thing will be, that

we shall hear of Arthur's waltzing with that horrid Madame von Moerkerke."

Aileen smiled, but made no answer, though she was in such excellent spirits the rest of the day, that it was obvious that *she* had no fear of Arthur or a rival.

CHAPTER IV.

It was on this same day that the mournful event took place of the annual dinner given by Mr. Willis to his mother and sisters-in-law. Janet and Rose sighed and groaned about it considerably before it took place, because they justly observed, that as nothing gave Charles any pleasure, and as it gave them none to see his melancholy face twice in the day instead of once, it was hard to have the trouble of dressing and to lose their comfortable evening at home. "Poor Mary has been dead now for three years, I really think he might ask one or two people to meet us; it is so absurd we four sitting in that gloomy dining-room, with nothing to say to each

other. I feel always as if I should lose the use of my limbs before the first course is over, and I get the cramp in my feet, and a very peculiar headache. 'Charles's own headache' I believe it is called in the medical books."

"Yes," said Rose, "and then Mamma always says, 'I wish you would not look so glum when we dine at Columbia Lodge, a little cheerful society is so good for poor Charles.' Now what connection there is between Charles and cheerfulness, except that they both begin with Ch, I do not know."

"Well, we must do our best to-day, I have a great mind to tell him of all those young men landing at Pleasance, and that lovely lilac gown of Lady Chester's, and the old lady in grey, and the grand carriage with the Duke's coronet that came afterwards; but somehow when I have collected a few little topics of a light kind, Charles looks so like a mute at a funeral, that I cannot bring them out. However, one comfort is, that our old grey gowns will do, and we want to wear them out."

But when they arrived at Columbia, the grey gowns proved to have been below the requirements of the day. A very showy coach drove up to the door, from which issued an equally showy lady, in a very bright pink gown, and two important looking gentlemen, father and son, all three with such very high noses, and such jet black hair, and so obviously of Jewish descent, that it seemed impossible that they should not be announced as Baron and Baroness Sampson and Baron Moses Sampson. Consequently they were ; and to the surprise of the girls, and much to their satisfaction, Mr. Greydon the curate immediately followed.

“Too much for me,” whispered Willis to Mrs. Hopkinson with an agonized look, “but the Sampsons invited themselves, and as you know my respect for the church, I asked Greydon ; for, in fact, I wanted an eighth to make up my party.”

It was altogether quite a lively affair. Baroness Sampson was full of facetious little affectations, absolutely affable to the Hopkin-

sons, and she did the honours of Willis' gravity with much pleasantry, and infinite want of tact, once arriving at calling him "you funny man," which threw Rose into an irrepressible fit of the giggles.

It was obvious that Willis and Baron Sampson were leagued in some important speculation, which had brought about a degree of intimacy that might have been friendship, if either of them had been susceptible of that sentiment, and they would have liked to talk shares, and capital, and investments, if they had met with any encouragement. But Baron Moses was by way of being a fast young man about town, and bent on astonishing the Hopkinsons by anecdotes of the clubs, and the opera, and Prince Albert; and the *sémillante* Baroness shook her black ringlets, and also her ear-rings, and chains, and bracelets to that extent, that they formed quite a musical accompaniment to her assertion that business was not to be attended to. She came for fresh air and fresh conversation.

"Do tell me something about Dulham,

Mrs. Hopkinson ; I want the Baron to take a villa. I adore flowers and green lawns ; London kills me. It is such a stuffy, sad place, and *so* wicked !” This last moral observation was addressed to Mr. Greydon in compliment to his clerical functions.

“ Should I like Dulham, Willis ? Is there anybody here one knows ?”

“ I should think not. But I am a sad recluse, I know nobody !”

“ Ah, now, I won’t have you talk in that way ! If I have a villa here, I shall insist on your knowing everybody. Is there any house that would suit us ? I must have it on the banks of the river. That dear river—I really worship your Thames !”

“ Pleasance might have suited you, but Lord Chester has just taken it,” said Mrs. Hopkinson.

“ Lord Chester ! Dear me ! the man with the pretty wife you mean. They are both quite the rage in our set.”

“ Do you know them, Baroness ?”

“ Well, no, not exactly ; but still, living in

the same set, and seeing them so constantly with my friend, Baroness Rothschild, I somehow feel as if I did." The Sampsons had been asked once to a large party at Gunnersbury. "And so *they* live here?"

"She does, poor young thing! Ah, it's a sad story!"

"She does not seem very sad," said Mr. Greydon, quietly.

"Why, do you know them, Mr. Greydon?" asked Janet, with some surprise.

"I had a note from Lady Chester this morning, asking me to call upon her. Her sister wished to know if she could be of any use in the school or village, and Lady Chester is anxious to do all she can, in her invalid state, for our little charities."

"Does Lady Chester look very ill?"

"Very delicate, I should say; but she seems to have high spirits. I enjoyed my visit, the two sisters were so unaffected and amiable, and extremely pretty."

Janet coloured. All the young ladies of Dulham, and many of the old ones, were more

or less in love with Mr. Greydon, Janet rather more than less. None of them had well grounded hopes of any return to their attachment. Mr. Greydon was an excellent young curate, a thorough gentleman, and lived on very good terms with his parishioners; but any idea of marrying on £300 a year, (the amount of his income), had never crossed his mind, and it was impossible for any one of his victims to boast of a word or a look of preference. Still Janet, in moments of extreme confidence, used to impart to Rose that if anybody gave Mr. Greydon a good living, or say, a bishopric, (he would make such a bishop!) or if a large fortune were suddenly left him, she somehow felt sure that he would marry, and that it would appear he had distinguished her all the time.

Though Rose was, of course, very much attached to him herself, yet, as she could conceive the possibility of being happy with somebody else, and as Janet was the eldest, and ought to have the first choice, Rose gave in to these flattering hopes, and always read

what the papers said of the illness of a bishop, or the death of a dean with great interest on Janet's account.

Admiration of Lady Chester, Janet could have borne, but she did not quite approve of his thinking both sisters so pretty.

“There was such a grand carriage down our lane to-day, Willis; Charlie clapped his hands and was quite in glee, poor little man! four horses, and postillions, and outriders, quite a pretty sight, and such a grand looking lady in it.”

“The Duchess of St. Maur,” said Mr. Greydon, “she came in while I was there.”

“Dear me, one of the Queen's Ladies. She went out of waiting last week, didn't she, girls?”

Mrs. Hopkinson always read the Court Circular and the Police Reports. The rest of the paper was beyond her powers.

“Ah, the Duchess of St. Maur. Quite one of your tip-tops,” said the Baroness, “the sort of fine lady I carefully avoid. I suppose you were glad to get away, Mr.

Greydon." She rather grudged to a curate the chance of becoming acquainted with a Duchess.

"I was going away just as she arrived, but Lady Chester made me stay. The Duchess takes a great interest in our Convalescent Hospital; and I was not sorry to have an opportunity of interesting one of the Ladies Committee in our improvements."

"And did she talk of the Queen and the Princess Royal," asked Mrs. Hopkinson, who lived in a state of enthusiastic and loyal curiosity about the Court.

"No," he said, with a smile; "we did not soar beyond Susan Hopkins' asthma, and Keziah Brown's rheumatism. The Duchess seemed well acquainted with all the old ladies."

"Well, I suppose the aristocracy are not so bad as we are told," said Mrs. Hopkinson beaming with benevolence, "they seem to do a kind thing now and then."

"Now and then you may well say," murmured Willis. "What can they know of suffer-

ing? ah! let them once feel what real grief is, and there would be an end of their balls and réunions and postillions and outriders," he added, after an emphatic pause.

"But, I suppose," suggested Mrs. Hopkinson, doubtingly, "they do lose their friends and children like other people, and perhaps care about them."

Willis shook his head, and Mrs. Hopkinson again reverted to her favourite topic. "And did you hear nothing at all about the Queen, Mr. Greydon?"

"Nothing. Oh, yes! there was some arrangement made about a concert at the Palace. The Duchess was to take Miss Grenville, as Lady Chester was not going."

"Ah! not asked, so like our good Queen. She would not invite anybody in Lady Chester's position, and yet is kind to her sister. There never *was* such a sovereign. Are you going to this concert, Baroness?"

"No, it seems odd, but we are not asked this time," said the Baroness with an air of modest pride. "I suspect we are out of

favour at Court, but a Drawing-Room is my aversion, and I have been sadly remiss this year; absolutely neglected the birthday, which was very naughty of me, and so I am left out of this party."

As that had been invariably her fate with regard to all parties at the Palace, the resignation she evinced had probably become a matter of habit; but she hinted an intention of bringing the Queen to her senses, by staying away from the next Drawing-Room too. She, however, enlivened the evening to the Hopkinsons, by accounts of various splendid festivities at which she said she had assisted; and when the party dispersed, leaving Willis leaning against the chimney-piece with his head in his hands, the Hopkinsons walked home declaring the Baroness was very entertaining, and that the dinner had been really pleasant.

"And I am rather glad we wore our grey gowns," said Rose. "Do you know that when Janet was sitting by the Baroness, I thought she looked much the nicest of the

two, more like a lady without all those flowers and trinkets."

"I wonder Mr. Greydon did not offer to see us safe home," said Janet. "I suppose *that* Miss Grenville *is* very pretty."

CHAPTER V.

THERE was no doubt, as Mr. Greydon had said, that Blanche *was* very delicate, and she was one of those exciteable people whose health fade when their spirits are depressed, and who expand into strength when their minds are at ease. She caught a slight cold by lingering near the river on a damp evening, and when Aunt Sarah paid her weekly visit to Pleasance, she found Blanche stretched on the sofa, pale and shrunk, with red eyes and hot hands, a feeble attempt at a cap at the very back of her head, and much Mechlin lace, and soft muslin and pink ribbon, professing to be an invalid's dressing-gown.

“ My dear child, what is the matter ? ”

“ All sorts of things, Aunt Sarah. In the

first place, I am very ill, Aileen has sent for Dr. Ayscough. Now just hear my cough."

"A failure, I think," said Aunt Sarah, "an attempt at a cough, rather than the thing itself."

"Then my throat is so sore. Do you think it will turn to that sore throat with the difficult name. It kills people so rapidly, Aunt Sarah, that there will be no use in telegraphing for Arthur; he could not arrive in time."

"Very well, my dear, then I will not send for him, besides I am not absolutely convinced that you have diphtheria."

"Then after all I said to Edwin, he brought Colonel Hilton here again yesterday; he said he could not help it, that Colonel Hilton *would* join him in his ride, and I have written to tell Arthur, and I know he will think I am flirting, and then he will begin to flirt himself. I assure you, Aunt Sarah, he did once before, just because Colonel Hilton rode with me. He owned it, so it is not one of my fancies."

“Just lend me your scissors, Blanche; this netting-silk knots so, I must cut it. I think it most likely, my dear, that Arthur—there! another knot—what was I saying? Oh, that though Arthur might be jealous, as a lover, of every man you spoke to, it is not very likely, that with his good sense and warm feelings, and with the dependence he must have in your affection, he will suspect you of encouraging any attentions of Colonel Hilton. However, I am glad you write and tell him everything.”

“Of course I do, and as you say, dear Aunt, it is very different now we are married. Arthur must know that I could not care now for anybody’s admiration but his,” and Blanche sat up on her sofa, and slipped off her little cap, and began to revive.

“But then I have not told you my worst misfortunes. I have had no letter for three days, and those dreadful Miss Hopkinsons began to play on their pianoforte this morning, and actually played the Dead March in Saul, and it gave me all sorts of shocking

presentiments. I thought Arthur must be ill because he did not write—and in short, Aunt Sarah, I have made up my mind to go to Berlin, and have sent for Dr. Ayscough to tell him I am going.”

There was a pause, “Aileen goes with me, Aunt Sarah, and if Edwin can get leave, he will go part of the way with us.” Another pause. “Why don’t you speak, Aunt Sarah?”

“My dear, I have nothing to say, your plan seems so complete, I can suggest no improvement; but I think you had better not begin to pack up till your doctor comes—and here he is. Lady Chester seems nervous to-day, Dr. Ayscough, and will be the better for a talk with you,” and Aunt Sarah withdrew.

“Well, what is it? You must tell me quickly, as I have not five minutes to spare. Why ain’t you dressed and out in the garden? It would be a fine day for a row on the river.”

“I have got a bad cold and a sore throat.

but that is of no consequence," said Blanche, trying to look dignified. "What I wanted to tell you is, that I am very uneasy about Lord Chester, and I am going to join him at Berlin."

"To join him at Berlin, eh?" said Dr. Ayscough, feeling her pulse in an absent manner, as if he had not the remotest idea that Blanche had a wrist, or that he had got hold of it. "And Lord Chester is ill, is he?"

"How *can* I know? I have not had a letter from him these three days—not a line!"

"Oh!" said Doctor Ayscough, and it was a satisfied Oh; expressing that he was now completely master of the case, and that the red eyes and fluttering pulse were precisely the symptoms he should expect to find.

"You are like my patient, Mrs. Armistead, her husband went with yours, I think—hers is a case of inflamed eyes; and when I told her not to use them, she said, 'she was not the least called upon to do so, as luckily she has

not heard from Mr. Armistead for some days, so she was not obliged to write to him.' ”

“What a horrid woman! but still it is a comfort to know she has had no letters either. But I want to consult you about my journey.”

“When do you start?”

“This afternoon, if you think I am equal to it,” said Blanche, who began to want, at least, a shew of opposition.

“You would not go, I presume, if you did not feel *quite* equal to it,” said Dr. Ayscough, coolly. “But there is only one more train to Folkestone this afternoon—you must make haste. Do you go by Ostend?”

“I suppose so; but Edwin will settle all that, I expect him soon. To say the truth, I do not well know my way to Berlin. It is a long journey, isn't it, Doctor Ayscough?”

“That depends upon who undertakes it. Miss Grenville goes with you?”

“Yes.”

“And that little flighty French maid, who always calls calomel '*le calmant*,' and has about as much idea of being useful as that

Dresden figure. Well, I wish you well through it; I have left a prescription for your cold in case you do not get off to-day. Of course you have your passports ready?" He felt certain she had not.

"Passports!" said Blanche eagerly, "no, that I haven't. I never thought about them, must I have a passport?"

"It is generally considered necessary for travellers on the continent."

"Well then, I can't go to-day."

"I never supposed you could," said Dr. Ayscough, laughing. "I will come and see how the cold goes on to-morrow, and perhaps this evening's post may bring a letter; and then you will not start for Berlin till the afternoon. Good morning."

He was waylaid in the hall by Aunt Sarah, who had somehow taken a diphtheria alarm, and by Aileen, who was frightened out of her senses at this sudden journey, and her responsibility for her sister's safety.

"What do you think of her throat?"

"Ah, bye the bye, her throat, I have not

thought about it, there is nothing the matter with it."

"And this dreadful journey," Aileen said, "of course you have stopped that?"

"No, I have rather encouraged it."

"Oh dear, have you? what shall I do if she is taken ill on the road? and nothing but that silly Justine to help us, and I felt so sure you would stop it."

"There is nothing to stop, my dear Miss Grenville. Your sister has got into one of her nervous moods, because she has not heard from Lord Chester. She knows as well as I do that she cannot undertake the journey; if she had been opposed, she would have worked herself up to the attempt. Give her the composing draught I have ordered; she will probably hear from Lord Chester by this evening's post, and to-morrow we can have a good laugh at her;" and he hurried off.

Blanche was, in truth, rather disappointed that he had made so light of her ailments and her heroism, but continued reading her Bradshaw, and coughing till post time; then

there came two letters from Arthur; one that had taken its natural course, and another that had gone a round by some Dulham in Yorkshire.

“Now is not that so like the Post Office?” she said, “letters that are of no consequence are always delivered directly, but when Arthur writes to me, they send his letters all over England. Arthur is quite well, and thinks that he shall get away before the three months are over, and Madame von Moerkerke is grown quite plain. Poor woman, after all she was a good-natured little thing; and Arthur says just what you said, Aunt Sarah, about Colonel Hilton. I declare my throat is better, and if you will ring for Justine, Aileen, I will dress. What a horrid smell of smoke there is!”

There certainly was, Justine came up quite “*éperdue*,” and in a high state of affected suffocation; leaving the doors open to let all the smoke in, and shutting the windows to prevent it from going out. She had always heard it was right to shut the windows when the

house was on fire ; and her eyes watered so, she really could not see to fasten mylady's hooks and eyes, and mylady's gown was all awry at last.

“But *is* the house on fire?” said Blanche, half laughing, “because, if it is, we may as well make our escape.”

“No,” said Aileen, who had just run up stairs, “it is not on fire, but something has gone radically wrong with the kitchen flue, the smoke keeps pouring into the house, instead of going up the chimney, like well-behaved smoke ; even the drawing-rooms are quite untenable.”

“And my room gets worse every moment. We must take refuge in the summer-house, Aileen.”

“But it is raining, and your cold?”

“Oh, that is not much, and anything is better than this. Give me heaps of shawls, Justine, and then we will rush into the drawing-room, and save our beloved Aunt Sarah, and carry her off to our wretched little asylum in the garden. Where are my letters? we

will take them with us ; and now, Aileen, I am ready.”

They found all the servants in a state of dismay, ill-temper, and soot, and it really became necessary to leave the house, much to Aunt Sarah's dismay, who thought it a dangerous experiment. However, they settled Blanche on a hard bench, about as comfortable as a gridiron, and in a summer-house, half-trellis, half-earwigs, and Aileen glided backwards and forwards under an umbrella, bringing cushions, and cloaks, and clogs, and finally Aunt Sarah's netting ; and the important butler came to announce that he had sent into the village for a person who understood the chimney and its strange ways ; he really could not undertake it, and the smoke, as he phrased it, gained upon him every minute. So, as Blanche said, they seemed likely to pass their afternoon in a mitigated shower bath ; but just then, a portly figure was seen coming up the gravel walk, and Mrs. Hopkinson, in very short petticoats, displaying a pair of feet that left large impressions on the soaked

gravel, a shawl tied over her cap, and with a black mittened hand, holding a blue cotton umbrella, presented herself.

She began the set speech which she had been composing ever since she took her resolution of offering shelter to the Pleasance ladies. "I heard accidentally through my cook," (Blanche pinched Aunt Sarah,) "that your kitchen was on fire, and I came to ask if your Ladyship would not take shelter in my parlour. But, good gracious me!" she exclaimed, in her natural manner, as she furled her umbrella and entered the arbour, "what a place for you ladies to be in! why it's all of a slop, and dripping so. There! there's a great drop gone down my collar. Why, you'll catch your deaths. Do, for goodness sake, come into my house. Now, ma'am, take my arm—of course you've got your clogs on, and do wrap your shawl well round you."

"You are very kind," said Blanche, "but—"

"Very kind, indeed," interposed Aunt Sarah, "perhaps you will give Lady Chester

your arm, and Miss Grenville and I will follow, I am sure we are extremely obliged to you. Aileen, just pick up my netting mesh, it is in that puddle. Now, Blanche."

And before Blanche could name any objections, she found herself under the blue umbrella, her hand under Mrs. Hopkinson's fat arm, and both of them wading through the little rivulet that usually passed for the gravel walk. "There," said Mrs. Hopkinson, as they reached her door, "now, my girls will take care of you; and as I am wet through, and can't well get wetter, I'll just step back and tell your maid to send you some dry things, and as I know that kitchen of old, I daresay I can give your servants a useful hint about the smoke."

The Miss Hopkinsons were as hospitable as their mother, a fire was lighted in the best parlour, a sofa wheeled round for Blanche, who was looking pale and blue, slippers and dressing gowns produced, hot wine and water administered, and when Justine arrived with dry cloaks, they quietly withdrew, and left the ladies to their own devices.

CHAPTER VI.

“WELL, Aunt,” said Blanche, “if you will candidly own that Mrs. Hopkinson *is* fat, and *does* wear mittens, and *does* know what passes in my kitchen, I will handsomely concede that she is a most hospitable neighbour, and that her dry room is very comfortable after our wet arbour.”

“And you may add, my dear, that a semi-detached house has its merits ; if one half catches fire, you can take refuge in the other. And now, Blanche, you had better keep quiet where you are, and Aileen and I will go to our friends below, and thank them. Just bring my netting, Aileen.”

“But I should like to thank them, too, for it was very kind of the old lady to come

swimming out to the rescue, and as I see 'hot tea' expressed in every line of her benevolent countenance, I feel confident she will propose to bring me some; so, if she does, will you encourage the idea?"

Blanche was right. The tea-urn was on the table, brown-bread and butter prepared, and a curious foreign china tea-service laid out, which excited the envy of Aileen, and the admiration of Aunt Sarah, who was learned in porcelain.

"Well, I believe it is reckoned curious, my husband brought it me when he came back from his third trip to China; no, it was his fourth, and he set so much store by it, that, of course, I could not say *I* thought it ugly; but I like the old willow pattern best, and we only use this on great occasions. And, now, I should like to take Lady Chester a nice cup of hot tea, but perhaps I should disturb her."

"Oh, no," said Aileen, "my sister was wishing for some tea, and if you do not mind the trouble, I am sure she would be

very glad to see you, and thank you for your very great kindness."

"Kindness—bless you, Miss Grenville! why where's the kindness in taking you three ladies out of the smoke and rain, I should like to know? If you have not all caught cold it's next to a miracle," and Mrs. Hopkinson walked off with her tea and bread and butter. She was inclined, thanks to the 'Weekly Lyre,' to be rather more formal with Lady Chester than she had been with the aunt and sister, she wished to shew her strong disapprobation of a young wife separating herself voluntarily from her husband. She almost grudged her the Japan tea-cup and saucer, and thought the willow pattern would have done, but somehow she could not keep up her sternness. Blanche received her so courteously, was so earnest in her gratitude for the hospitality she had met with and looked so fragile and pretty, that Mrs. Hopkinson subsided with a sigh into her usual motherly manner, and her conviction that it was all Lord Chester's fault.

“Well, you do not look much fit for any troubles in this world, and I hope you will have none worse than to-day’s.”

“Oh! it has been a very happy day really,” said Blanche, smiling, “I had been very uneasy about some letters that had been missent, and they came just before we were driven out of the house, so I did not mind that at all. Indeed, I think it was very good fun, now it is over, and it has given me the pleasure of making your acquaintance.”

“You are very good,” said Mrs. Hopkinson, “and I hope your letters were satisfactory.”

“Oh, that they always are when they come! Arthur writes such excellent letters! but the post-office has been very ill-managed lately—in fact, ever since he went abroad, and I foolishly fancied he must be ill, and I was on the point of setting off for Berlin.”

“Law! my dear lady, the idea of your going off to Berlin, and in your situation, too! Why, I believe it is thousands of miles off, and the sea to cross and all! And Arthur is?”—

“Lord Chester, of course,” said Blanche, laughing, “I ought to have called him so, I suppose. You see, Mrs. Hopkinson, he was sent off quite suddenly on that tiresome mission to Berlin, and we had never been parted for an hour, and I thought I should die while he was away, or that he would die while I was away. In short, my aunt says I am full of fancies ; but you don’t know how dreadfully lonely I feel without Arthur !”

“Don’t I, my dear ?” said Mrs. Hopkinson, quite warming up to the subject, and forgetting what she called her company manners, “why John has been away the best part of every year since we married. I am sure I might have been a widow twenty times over for all the good I have of his company ! I have got used to it now ; but the first time that he went, just after I was confined of Janet, I thought he would be lost at sea every time the wind blew, and the wind did nothing but blow that year, though when John came back he said it was all my fancy, and that he had made a remarkably smooth passage.”

“ And John is ? ” asked Blanche.

“ My husband, Captain Hopkinson. ”

“ Captain Hopkinson ! ” exclaimed Blanche, jumping up from the sofa, “ and did he ever command the ‘ Alert ? ’ ”

“ To be sure he did, and a regular tub she was ! ”

“ Well, this is curious ! ” and Blanche seized Mrs. Hopkinson’s fat hands, and pressed them warmly, mittens and all. “ Captain Hopkinson saved Arthur’s life, by his care and kindness when Arthur caught that bad fever on his passage to the Cape. ”

“ Not Lord Chester surely ! I always make John tell me the history of all his passengers. I don’t half like those ladies from India, who are always coming home to their children, or going back to their husbands ; all I can say is, they don’t fret on the voyage. I can trust John, but I always like to know who is on board, and I am sure I should have remembered Lord Chester’s name ! ”

“ But his elder brother was alive then, he was only Captain Templeton. ”

“ Captain Templeton ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Hopkinson, jumping up in her turn, “ you don’t mean to say, Lady Chester, that your husband is that Captain Templeton who was the life and soul of the ‘ Alert ’ till he caught that bad fever which carried off so many of John’s best hands. Goodness me ! why John talked of nothing else when he came home from that voyage ! I thought I should have dropped off my chair sometimes with laughing at some of Captain Templeton’s jokes ; and he came to see John when we were at South-sea—found him out though John was at home only for three weeks—and was so friendly, and shook hands with me, and said John was a capital fellow, which to be sure he is. And to think that he should be Lord Chester—and that you should be Lady Chester, and sitting in that wet arbour ! *That* is a curious coincidence ! ”

Mrs. Hopkinson’s ideas on the subject of coincidences were rather vague and ungrammatical, but Blanche was not disposed to be critical ; and when Aileen came up to say

that Baxter had announced that the kitchen chimney had come to its senses, and that my Lady might come home—she found the two ladies both talking at once about the voyage of the ‘Alert,’ and Blanche half sorry to go, till she had heard more particulars of Arthur’s cabin and his illness.

CHAPTER VII.

“WELL, those are three as nice ladies as ever I wish to see,” said Mrs. Hopkinson, when her guests had departed, “and as for that Lady Chester, I’m quite in love with her. She thinks so much of your father, and spoke in such a way of him. I wish John had heard her!”

“Miss Grenville was very nice, too, mamma, and took great notice of dear little Charlie, and played at cat’s cradle with him,” said Rose.

“I did not think quite so much of her as of the old lady,” said Janet. “Did you make out what her name was, mamma?”

“Lady Sarah Mortimer, my dear, she is aunt to the two sisters who are twins, and

she seems to have had charge of Lady Chester. Miss Grenville lived with the other guardian."

"I cannot think how she comes to know so much about schools," said Janet, who had hitherto considered herself quite unequalled in that line; "she seems to go to our school every day, and says Mr. Greydon thinks this, and Mr. Greydon wishes me to do that; and it appears he called at Pleasance again to-day. Very odd, he hardly ever speaks when I am at the school, and as for calling, he has only called twice since he came to Dulham. However," she added humbly, "it is not very surprising he should like to go to Pleasance. He is so very superior himself, that he naturally likes other superior people; and to be sure, Lady Chester and her sister are very different from any of us. Rose, don't you wish that mamma and you and I were regular fine ladies?"

"Oh, my dear," interrupted Mrs Hopkinson, "don't talk so. You and Rose may try to be like those two pretty creatures if you

please, and a nice job you will make of it; but as for turning me into a fine lady, thank you for nothing. I should like to see John's face if I met him dressed in a grey moire antique and a lace mantle, and twiddling a little bit of netting silk over an ivory stick. No, my dears, you must let me be as I am, I'm too old to improve."

"You don't want a bit of improvement, dear old mother," said both her girls, giving her a good hug, "I was only joking," added Janet.

"And only a very leetle bit jealous of Miss Grenville," whispered Rose.

Blanche and Aileen went the next day to call on Mrs. Hopkinson, to repeat their thanks for her hospitalities, and to see the silver inkstand which Arthur, had presented to the Captain.

"Such a sweet inscription," Mrs. Hopkinson said, "'To Captain John Hopkinson, from his obliged and faithful friend Arthur Templeton.' I don't suppose John would take one thousand pounds for that inkstand. Would

your Ladyship allow me to shew you a picture of John?"

"I should like to see it of all things," said Blanche.

"The only fault of it is, that it is not the least like him. John had it done at Macao, by a Chinaman, Chiang Foo, who was supposed to be a good artist; and it was very kind of John to think of it. But considering that he is a stout, florid man with blue eyes and a round face, I don't think Chiang Foo has hit him off quite cleverly," and Mrs. Hopkinson proceeded to justify this assertion by producing the picture of a sallow figure, with half shut black eyes and high cheek bones, standing apparently on nothing, and neither receiving nor casting the slightest shadow. Blanche could not help laughing; but Mrs. Hopkinson looked at it rather sentimentally, and said, "At all events, it was done from John, and the buttons on his coat are all right, and look very natural."

"But I am sure it does not do him justice."

“No, indeed,” and altogether Mrs. Hopkinson felt gratified and interested in her new acquaintances. Willis had called, in the morning, and had heard the history of the preceding day, on which he made the obvious comment, that he did not think much of a little smoke and rain. If it had been in Columbia Lodge, he had no doubt that the house would have been burnt down, but he was used to trials, and should quietly have submitted to that.

“I came to tell you, Mrs. Hopkinson, that you will probably have a visit from the Baroness to-day. She wrote me word she was coming to make a search for this villa she wants, and she wished me to accompany her; but if there is a thing in the world that depresses my spirits, it is rambling over a set of empty houses, smelling of damp and desolation. So I have left a note to say you would go with her, and I shall take myself off to town. The girls can just step to Randall’s and get a list of the houses he has on hand. Where’s Charlie?”

“ He’s asleep just now.”

“ Oh ! when he wakes, you can give him this toy, I brought it for him ; I saw it in the Strand, and it took my fancy.”

It was a nice little model of a tomb, and when a spring was touched at the side, a skeleton jumped out, made a bow, and jumped in again. Willis looked at it with a grim satisfaction, which was not at all diminished by the positive refusal of his mother and sisters-in-law to allow Charlie even to hear of it, much less to see it. Willis really was fond of his child, and did not press his pet skeleton on their acceptance, when he found they thought it might frighten Charlie. In fact, he was rather glad to take it home again, for his own diversion.

Lady Chester and Aileen had hardly sat down in Mrs. Hopkinson’s parlour, when the showy carriage appeared, and the Baroness and her son were announced.

“ Do not say anything about us,” whispered Blanche ; “ we shall amuse ourselves with Charlie,” and Mrs. Hopkinson took the hint,

and turned her attention to the Baroness, who was overflowing with affability and grandeur.

“That naughty Willis has run off to London, and has referred me to you, Mrs. Mrs.—”

“Dear Mrs. Hopkinson,” said Aileen promptly, in her soft voice, “are you sure this is not your chair I have appropriated?”

“To you, Mrs. Hopkinson,” continued the Baroness, ignoring the audacious Aileen, “he says you and your girls—where are they by the bye?—will help me in this difficult matter of a villa. I am afraid I am very particular, I am so spoiled. Now you, with this dear, tidy little cottage, can’t guess what my troubles are, what with housekeeper’s room, and the Baron’s billiards, and Moses’ smoking, and my own suite of apartments—a cottage, though I am sure I envy you, would not suit us.”

“Here is a list my girls have brought from the house agent’s; there are not many houses vacant just now, Acacia Place is one of the best, Baroness.”

“It sounds citizenish,” said that lady, who had passed all her early life in the very heart of that city; “but to be sure,” she added, with an air of deep thought, “I can change the name.”

“I always admire Ivy Cottage as I pass it,” said Blanche, trying to be civil to Mrs. Hopkinson’s overpowering friend, “and I see a board up there.”

“A cottage is out of the question for me,” said the Baroness loftily, wishing to repress these intrusive young people. “So, Mrs. Hopkinson, we will go on with our business; Bellevue—that sounds as though it might do.”

“The house is tolerable, but unfortunately it is at the back of High Street, and you can see neither the river nor the common. Marble Hall, next to Columbia, is the one I should recommend.”

“And a precious cheerful neighbourhood we should be in,” said Baron Moses, confidentially, to the two sisters, whose beauty had made a great impression on him. “As the

belle mère, the mother-in-law," he translated condescendingly, "is occupied with my blessed mamma, and can't hear; I think I may venture to say that Mr. Willis is about the slowest coach I ever attempted to drive."

"Mr. Willis is my papa, and does not keep a coach," said Charlie, who was sitting on Aileen's knee, "so it could not go slow."

"Capital! capital!" said Moses, with an affected laugh. "Very true, my little man, *enfant terrible!* It was the Miss Hopkinsons that I met at dinner at Columbia, not you, ladies, I think?"

"No," said Blanche, demurely, "we have never had the honour of dining with Mr. Willis."

"Honour you may well call it, not pleasure; but my mother who is *entichée du beau Willis*, quite taken with him, means to humanise him, and make him give constant dinners. I presume I am speaking to residents of Dulham, and I hope we may have the pleasure of meeting at the festive board of the *égayant Willis*."

“ I rather doubt whether Mr. Willis will ever ask *us*,” said Aileen, trying to look pensive.

“ Oh ! but he shall. I hate exclusiveness, it’s bad enough in London ; but in the country where amusements are scarce, it is insufferable !”

“ I am sorry to interrupt you, Moses,” said the Baroness, “ but the Baron will be frantic if I keep the greys standing ; I wish your father would not give such enormous prices for my horses. I am sure, Mrs. Hopkinson, your friends will excuse you if I take you away, but I am a perfect child in household matters, and your advice will be invaluable. Gunnersbury is my beau idéal of a villa, but that, of course, I cannot expect to find here ; so we will just look at Marble Hall. I wish I could have had Pleasance.”

Blanche and Aileen immediately rose to depart.

“ Yes, Pleasance is a stylish-looking concern,” said Baron Moses, “ though I only know it from the river. A charming spot for picnics.”

“Ah,” said the Baroness, “what suits the Chesters, would, of course, have suited me ; but, I fear, there is no chance of their giving it up. My friend Madame Steinbaum writes from Berlin—”

“Aileen,” said Blanche colouring and looking annoyed, “we really *must* go, we are detaining Mrs. Hopkinson ; and I have not made my petition. My sister goes to town to-morrow for a concert. Will you let little Charlie come and pay me a visit ?”

“Me will come,” said Charlie, “me like you very much—me not like that black man,” he added in a whisper, and with a look at Baron Moses.

“Well, then, that is settled. Good bye, Mrs. Hopkinson,” she said cordially to that lady, who followed her to the door, her face the colour of the coquelicot ribbon in her cap, and herself distracted by the grandeur and impertinence of the Baroness, which imposed upon her and shocked her. With a slight haughty bow to the Sampsons, Blanche departed.

“Then we will be off,” said the Baroness

“I hope I did not affront your friends, Mrs. Hopkinson, whoever they may be; but they seemed inclined to put themselves forward, and I feared it might lead to their claiming acquaintance if I settle here, which would embarrass me. I am afraid I was *tant soit peu farouche*,” (Mrs. Hopkinson wondered what that was, but settled that it was French for disagreeable) “but it is a point with me to keep young people in their proper places.”

“Of course,” said Mrs. Hopkinson, who was quite bewildered, “*improper places are shocking things.*”

“Brava! brava!” said the Baron clapping his hands, and then seeing that his hostess was beginning to look discomposed, he added graciously. “An excellent joke, but upon my soul, Mrs. Hopkinson, your friends are *belles à croquer*, that is to say, monstrous pretty creatures. Did not you think so, *madre adorata.*”

“Prettyish looking girls, I believe, but they want style. Who are these damsels whom the Baron chooses to patronize?”

‘I thought you knew Lady Chester and her sister, at least, by sight,’ said Mrs. Hopkinson, as sharply as her intense good humour would allow.

“Lady Chester and her sister!” screamed the Baroness, falling back into her chair, and turning as pale as was possible under the amount of rouge she wore. “Good heavens! Mrs. Hopkinson, why did not you name them? why did you not present them to me? I should have been too happy to shew them every attention for the sake of our mutual friends the Rothschilds, in fact, I really wished to make Lady Chester’s acquaintance, and I was scarcely civil, I am afraid.”

“That I can answer for,” said Baron Moses, who was in ecstasies with his mother’s discomfiture, “civility was not your forte just at the moment. *I*,” he added consequentially, “who can afford to follow my very vivid perceptions of what pleases *mon goût*, happily paid them every attention. I saw at once that they were intensely *comme il faut*.” He sunk the fact of having offered to procure

them an invitation to Willis's festive board.

"It is most distressing," said the Baroness, faintly. "They must think me—*me* of all people in the world entirely without *usage du monde*. Why upon earth did you not introduce us, Mrs. Hopkinson?"

"Lady Chester requested I would not," quietly replied Mrs. Hopkinson.

The Baroness received a vague and unpleasant impression, that the request signified a disinclination on the part of Lady Chester to make her acquaintance, and with her mania for fashion and fashionable people this annoyed her extremely. Quite subdued, she set forth on her travels in search of a house, almost disposed to put up with the want of a billiard-table, and inclined to believe that Ivy Cottage would suit her better than Marble Hall. But a bright red flock paper in the dining-room of the latter mansion, with several vulgar chandeliers and over-gilt console tables, were too much for her, she thought the room would "light up sweetly."

And having made Mrs. Hopkinson fag herself all over the house, to examine the attics, and the kitchen, and the cupboards, and the pumps, and do all the heavy work of the business, she dismissed her with the blandest apologies for requesting her to find her way home on foot, but "the Baron was very particular about his grey horses."

"Well," said Mrs. Hopkinson to the girls, as she was enjoying her tea after the fatigues of the day, "I'm regularly tired. That Baroness does not suit me nor my ways, and the airs she gave herself are not to be told. And there were those nice young ladies, *real* ladies to my mind, looking so simple and so quiet and playing so prettily with Charlie, while that great storm of a woman swept over them. Don't tell Willis, my dears, but I can't help thinking she is very vulgar: and I see why the Queen don't ask her to her concerts."

CHAPTER VIII.

“WHAT a woman!” was all the comment Blanche made on the Baroness, “but I should like to know what she has heard from Berlin—should not you Aileen? It must have been something about Arthur, because she implied that our stay at Pleasance would be prolonged. What could it be?”

“I dare say,” said Aileen, laughing, “my imagination will not go so far as yours has gone, she probably meant to intimate to us, simple rustics, that she was in all the political secrets of the Berlin negotiation. I should not wonder if the Baron were a stock-jobber, whatever that may be; but those sort of people always know, or pretend to know the

politics of the continent half an hour before the rest of the world. A hitch in the treaty may be worth money to the Sampsons."

"That would be bad enough," said Blanche. "It would keep Arthur longer abroad. Of course she could not mean that Arthur had got into any intanglement."

"Of course not. Oh, Blanche! Blanche! we want Aunt Sarah to keep you in order. And so you are going to have Charlie for your playfellow to-morrow whilst I am away."

"Yes, I have taken quite a fancy to that poor little child. He looks so frail and suffering, and he told me he used to come every day to this garden to see the boats, till we took the house. I wish, Aileen, when you go out, you would go to Merton's and buy me a large Noah's ark, some picture books, and any toys of a laughable description; that child wants to be amused. I wonder Dr. Ayscough has not been here to-day?"

But he did not appear. When he came the following day, he found Blanche and little Charlie seated on the bank with a long pro-

cession of small elephants, and gigantic lady-birds, all tending to an ark that did not seem adequate to house them, still less to admit eight yellow and red extinguishers, which were intended to represent Noah and his family.

“What now?” said the Doctor. “Why are you playing at Noah’s arks? I thought you were, at least, half way to Berlin.”

“No, you did not,” said Blanche, “you thought on such thing, you were only, as usual, humouring me and laughing at me, I saw that all the time. It is a great pity that I have known you all my life, I see through you so well.”

“Not half so clearly as I see through you, and it is a great advantage to you to have a steady old friend like myself, who withstands all your impetuositities. You were an impetuous baby when you were an hour old, and you are not tamed yet.”

“But I am improving rapidly, I might have fretted over an obscure hint about Berlin that I had to-day, and that I could easily

have magnified into a *bête noir*. Instead of which I have been sedulously at play with Charlie this last hour."

"And who is Charlie?" said the kind-hearted physician, taking the child's little wasted hand in his, and looking at him attentively. He could not see a sick child without trying to help it.

"He is the grandchild of my next door neighbour," and Blanche detailed the adventures of the preceding day, ending with an animated description of the magnificent Baroness.

"I know her," he said, "she is always sending for me, because she has nothing the matter with her, and I have not yet succeeded in curing her of her good health. And now, I have a valuable document for you, which I have persuaded Mrs. Armistead to give me." It was an extract from a letter of Mr. Armistead's, in which he said that their Prussian negotiation was nearly at an end, that he might come home any day, "but I think of taking a look at Dresden and Vienna,

and may perhaps push on to Prague. I want Chester to go with me, but he is spooney about his wife, and in a fidget to get home."

"Oh, thank you, thank you," said Blanche. "Now, is not it a blessing to have a spooney husband? What does spooney mean? However, I do not much care, it evidently means that Arthur is soon coming home. Poor Mrs. Armistead, I suppose she is very much distressed."

"Not a bit. She said she was very glad, that she wanted to go to the sea, and that Armistead was always so bored at the seaside, he was a worry to her, and now she could go in comfort."

Blanche shrugged her shoulders, and shuddered slightly at this painful picture of married life, and declined to believe that the Armisteads were a happy couple after their own fashion, and while she sat in a happy state of spooney meditation, Dr. Ayscough took her place with the Noah's ark. He settled Charlie on his knee and bowed, and barked, and mewed,

and made Shem knock down Japhet, and Mrs. Shem catch the grasshopper; and then putting the child down, he took Blanche aside, and said, "What are they doing with your little friend. He won't live unless he has proper medical treatment. He's a nice little fellow, make them bring him to my house to-morrow, and I will see him here again in a few days. Good-bye my little man."

"Don't go," said the child, "stay and bark a little more."

"No, no, I have no time for more barking to-day; but you come and see me to-morrow and bring Noah's dog with you; and do you," he said to Blanche, "go and frighten the grandmother. That is *your* duty for the day."

Blanche did as she was bid. She took little Charlie home, and when he had displayed his toys and was sent up stairs, she repeated to Mrs. Hopkinson the substance of her conversation with the physician.

The tears rolled down the old lady's cheeks

as she thanked Lady Chester. "But, you see, we must consult his father, and poor Willis is rather a down-hearted man, and never believes that anything can do good to anybody, or that anybody can do good to anything. But he is coming up the walk, and, perhaps, if your Ladyship told him all this in your cheerful way it might convince him. Ah, poor Willis, he has never recovered the loss of his wife!"

That was a state of affairs to interest Blanche, and she received Willis with a degree of commiseration that flattered him extremely, and satisfied his highest expectations in the way of pity.

"Of course, I should wish my unfortunate child to have every alleviation of which his unhappy state admits. It will do no good; he is doomed, doomed, as every one connected with me must be."

"Oh, don't say so, Charles," cried Janet. "Think of your sisters-in-law."

"But," he continued, with an added share of gloom, "it may be a satisfaction hereafter

to think that I had the advice of such an eminent physician, however useless it may be."

"You must not be so desponding," said Blanche, with tears in her eyes; she was actually a believer in Willis. "It is not surprising that, tried as you have been, you should tremble at the idea of a fresh bereavement; but I assure you, Dr. Ayscough is very sanguine about dear little Charlie."

"Sanguine!" said Willis, throwing up his eyes, "ah, he little knows! But I will not obtrude my sorrows on your Ladyship." In fact, he was in such a state of self-complacency at being recognized as a victim, that he was in imminent danger of being betrayed into cheerfulness. "I shall, of course, follow your advice. How is the poor little sufferer to go, ma'am?" he added, turning to Mrs. Hopkinson.

"Oh, there is no difficulty about that," said Blanche, "I am going to send the carriage to-morrow morning for my sister, and if Mrs. Hopkinson and Charlie will go in it, they can all come back together." She rose

to go as she spoke, Willis opened the door with a degree of civility he seldom practised, and Mrs. Hopkinson followed her into the passage, and ended by giving Lady Chester a warm kiss and sobbing out, "Well, I beg your pardon, but I could not have helped it if you had paid me for it. Nobody knows what that poor child has gone through, and he such a little dear, too! Only three years old! and I only hope he will live to thank you himself; for if ever there was a kind-hearted young creature it's yourself! and now just take care how you go down those steps, and God bless you!"

As Blanche sat by herself in the evening, she felt pleased with the recollection of the pleasure she had given, and planned another neighbourly act. She would try and see more of that interesting Mr. Willis, "and if I can persuade him," she thought, "to be a little more hopeful and resigned, it will add much to the comfort of that good-natured family. Indeed, I am not quite sure he is right to be so very miserable, and as every-

body has their mission they say, my present mission is to try and make Mr. Willis more resigned. I wonder whether he ever laughed in his life? If so, he might be brought to laugh again."

The expedition to London was successful, and Mrs. Hopkinson had a great deal of interesting intelligence to impart to her daughters on her return. The carriage was so smooth, and Lady Chester had had quite a little bed of cushions made up for Charlie, "and as for that Doctor, my dears, I should almost like a short illness if he would attend me. He has put Charlie quite on a new plan, and he has written down all that is to be done; for I suppose he saw, easily enough, that I was as stupid as an old post, and he will come and see him the first time he goes to Pleasance. What a number of good people there are in this world! Then we went to call for Miss Grenville in Grosvenor Square, and she was so interested in Charlie, and said that if anybody could do him good, Dr. Ayscough would; and I am sure that is true.

She had been at the Queen's concert, and seeing I was curious, she told me all about it; only, unluckily, she had not remarked the Queen's dress; but she said the Princess Royal wore a double skirt of white tarlatan looped up with roses, which is a good thing to know, and she said the Princess looked very happy, and thought that Charlie would have to go to the sea in time."

"Why, mamma, what *can* the Princess know of Charlie?"

"My dear," said Mrs. Hopkinson, laughing, "of course I meant Miss Grenville said that, but I have so much to tell, I mix it all somehow. Madame Grisi sang beautifully. There were at least twenty people waiting in the outer room—I mean at the Doctor's—but directly he saw little Charlie he called us in, and pretended to be so glad to see the wooden dog. I have quite enjoyed my drive, and Miss Grenville's talk, and the only disappointment is that the Prince of Prussia was not there—at the Palace, I mean."

When Aileen arrived at her own door, she

asked if there were any one with her sister, and seemed disappointed when she heard that Lord Chesterton was in the garden with my Lady—"No one else?"

"No, ma'am, Colonel Hilton has been here, but he went away directly my Lord came."

Aileen brightened a little, but instead of attempting to join her sister, she went musingly into the drawing-room, and threw herself into an arm-chair, apparently for the enjoyment of her own thoughts; and her absent manner so excited the curiosity of Baxter, that he thought himself obliged to follow, and to ask if she would like to take any refreshment after her drive. And as she did not seem clearly to comprehend what refreshment meant, and declined it with an absent "No, thank you," he went down stairs to inform the housekeeper's room that "there was a screw loose somewhere," which announcement produced a considerable degree of excitement in those regions.

Aileen was not left long to herself and her absorption. Lord Chesterton and Blanche

came in from the garden, Blanche with two bright red spots on her cheeks, and looking flurried, and Lord Chesterton most elaborately polite, and slightly irritable. He was generally a model father-in-law, and Blanche was sincerely attached to him, and anxious to please him; but there is no concealing the melancholy fact that he was by nature, what may be called prim, and primness under high pressure, is a very alarming quality. On his arrival at Pleasance, he had found a good-looking moustached young gentleman sitting alone with Blanche in the most earnest conversation; they both looked confused on seeing him, and the young officer withdrew in such haste, and in such manifest emotion, that Lord Chesterton's propriety took instant alarm, and produced a degree of formal civility, that almost came up to the courteousness of the last century. Blanche was no longer Bianca, or little Blanket, no paternal arm was passed round her waist, and no sportive admiration of her charms expressed. She became Lady Chester on the spot. Lord Chesterton

almost bowed as he enquired after her health, and the frigidity with which he asked if she *ever* heard of Lord Chester, froze her recollection of Arthur's animated letters, and they seemed to fade into thin sheets of blank paper.

To own the truth, Colonel Hilton's visit had annoyed her quite as much as it had discomposed Lord Chesterton. His manner was odd and excited, he expressed with needless repetition, his delight at finding her, for once alone; and Blanche tried in vain to believe that he had not attempted to take hold of her hand, as he began some disjointed sentences about past anxieties and present happiness. And it was at this crisis that Lord Chesterton arrived. No wonder he looked astonished, and that she felt almost guilty; and the sound of Aileen's carriage was a relief to them both, there would have been a scene, if their *tête-à-tête* had lasted much longer, so Blanche hurried her father-in-law into the house; and by the help of Aileen and her London topics, conversation

was carried on for a few more minutes, and then Lord Chesterton departed, or rather seemed to Blanche to vanish in a black cloud, which would dissolve eventually into a letter to Arthur, warning him of the folly of his wife.

“Oh, dear Aileen, what shall I do? he is so angry!”

“What *is* the matter, darling? I saw Lord Chesterton was not pleased, but don't cry about it—there must be some mistake. What has happened?”

“Why, it is all that dreadful Colonel Hilton. He came here this morning, actually came in at the garden gate, without asking if I were at home, and he began to talk in such a strange way. I am sure I never gave him the slightest encouragement to talk to me of his feelings, and his happiness, I do not care if he is happy, or miserable; and then Lord Chesterton came, and he looked astonished as well he might, and then to make matters worse, that odious Colonel Hilton rushed off like a madman, leaving my

beau-père to suppose that he had disturbed an interesting *tête-à-tête*, and I know he will write to Berlin. Oh, Aileen! what shall I say to Arthur?"

"I will tell you," said Aileen, clasping her sister fondly in her arms, "tell Arthur that Colonel Hilton is going to be your brother-in-law, and he came to ask you to write to my uncle for us. Blanche, he proposed to me last night at the concert, and I thought I should have been at home two hours ago, and should have told you my story before he came. Dearest, I am so happy."

"Oh, Aileen! my own darling, and so am I. Well, if ever there was a surprise thoroughly and entirely delightful it is this! And so all these visits were for you? Now I see how it was, and what a ridiculous goose I have been," and Blanche laughed like a child, till Aileen caught the infection, and laughed too, till she suddenly asked her sister what they were laughing at.

"Why, at me, child; was there ever any body so absurd as I have been? How Aunt

Sarah will triumph over me! but it was Arthur's fault, originally, he put it into my head that he was jealous of Colonel Hilton; so every time the poor man came here, I thought it was for love of me, or at all events, that Arthur would think so; and to-day I really believed he was going to make a declaration in form, and was doubting whether it were not my duty as a wife, at least to jump into the river to avoid hearing it. I really do think, as Aunt Sarah says, that my imaginativeness is increasing, and in the wrong direction. Why did not I imagine he was in love with you? nothing could be more natural, so I suppose that was the reason why I did not see it. But why did you not tell me, Aileen?"

"Because I was not sure of it myself. Last year, I saw a great deal of him at the Duchess of St. Maur's, and she always implied that her brother liked me; but then, you know, there was that Chancery suit going on about his fortune."

"No, I did not know it, I never read

Chancery suits, but I will for the future, I shall look upon them now as connections. But go on, Aileen, this is too interesting."

"Well, Uncle Leigh reads Chancery suits, for, if you recollect, he hurried me out of town last year, soon after you came to Aunt Sarah's."

"I know he did, and I have hated him ever since ; go on."

"He spoke to me about Colonel Hilton, and said he would have no encouragement given to a man who might be a pauper any day, that the suit would probably go against him ; and as I would not promise to avoid him, he carried me to Leigh Hall."

"So like him."

"Well, Alfred—" said Aileen, with a little hesitation.

"And so his name is Alfred, one of my favourite names ; but go on."

"Alfred tried, after I was gone, to make a friend of you ; but after he had seen you twice, your marriage was declared, so that plan of carrying on our story failed, and as I heard

nothing of him, and saw in the papers that he had gone abroad, I began to think he never had cared about me, but somehow that did not cure me of caring about him, and I was so unhappy, Blanche.”

“My darling, I don’t wonder; and you never told me a word about all this!”

“I thought I had been so silly; and when the law suit was decided in Alfred’s favour, and he came into that immense fortune, Uncle Leigh began to suspect that *he* had been silly too, for he asked me if he should invite Colonel Hilton to Leigh Hall. Think of the degradation; of course, I said *no*, decidedly; but I believe Uncle Leigh thought there might be a chance of my meeting him at your house, or he would not so readily have let me come when you wanted me.”

“And when you did come, there was I scowling away the very individual you wished to see,” said Blanche, again relapsing into one of her laughing fits. “But, however, all’s well that ends well; only I wish I knew what had become of the unfortunate Alfred; be-

tween me and my *beau-père*, he must have a low opinion of the manners of the Chestertons. Do you suppose he went back to town?"

"I feel sure somehow that we shall see him in the course of the day," said Aileen, with a placid satisfied smile. "But you must not call Alfred odious any more," she whispered.

"I never did, I said that the Colonel Hilton of my imagination was odious; but I like Alfred, who is to make my Aileen the happiest wife in the world, except her sister; and I shall soon begin to love him. But now I must write to Lord Chesterton."

"Oh! it is to be a secret, Blanche, for a few days."

"Yes, I know, dear, all marriages are secrets, till everybody has been told of them; but Lord Chesterton must be enlightened for the good of my character; and like all men embarked in great affairs, he loves a small confidence." So Blanche sat down and wrote:

"My dear Lord Chesterton. Your visit to-day was so unsatisfactory both to you and

myself, that you must come and see me again to-morrow or the next day at latest, and wish me joy of my darling Aileen's marriage to that Colonel Hilton who was sitting with me when you arrived to-day. I had never heard a word of their attachment, which it appears has been of many months standing; and was brought to a happy conclusion at the concert last night. He came to be received as a brother, and found that Aileen had not returned, and that I was utterly ignorant of what had occurred. His unexpected visit and his confused manner, distressed me, and when I saw how much you were annoyed, I felt that 'appearances were against me,' and I could not explain to you what was inexplicable to myself. Aileen's first few words made everything clear, and now you must come and be again the kind father you have always been to your poor little Blanket, who was a very wet blanket this morning. I could not help crying after you left me so coldly, but I am very happy now, and you have been always so kind to my sister, that I know you will

sympathise with her happiness, and I have extorted from her the permission to tell you what is to be a secret to the rest of the world for a few days.

“ Your affectionate daughter,

“ B. C.”

Now there was nothing in the world pleased Lord Chesterton so much as a small confidence. He liked to feel that he had in his possession an actual secret; something that was made clear in black and white to *him*, and remained a blank to the rest of the world. He carried these confidential letters about in his waistcoat pocket, occasionally alluding to them mysteriously, and perhaps allowing, to a very intimate friend the sight of one corner of the envelope, or of half the postage stamp.

Moreover, being very precise and reserved himself, the ease and frankness of his daughter-in-law were, to him, a constant source of surprise and amazement. He always recommended a *very little* more pru-

dence in her conversation, and perhaps a *shade* less of rashness in her opinions, but he would have been extremely sorry had she attended to his recommendations. He liked her as she was, frank and open, and a perfect contrast to himself. He was touched by her note, by her sensitiveness to his blame or praise, and by her perception of the dignified manner in which he had shewn his disapprobation of the slightest levity, and he arrived at Pleasance the following morning in a high state of paternal affection and affability. He shook hands warmly with Colonel Hilton, embraced Aileen, though not without some misgivings as to the propriety of the act, and presented her with a magnificent bracelet; whereupon she returned his embrace, and thereby relieved him of his scruples.

The rest of his visit was passed in petting and admiring his daughter, and having placed in her hand a gorgeous looking *porte-monnaie*, he ventured to say, "that though it was hardly decorous he should allude to certain

circumstances, yet that he was aware that his good little Blanche must be making preparations for an expected happy event, and that he had brought his contribution to what he believed, was called a *layette*." But this last word was too much for his delicacy, and he departed covered with confusion. The benevolent old villain was conscious that he had written to Arthur a mistaken statement of Blanche's conduct, and though the counter statement had followed immediately on the receipt of her note, he looked upon his offering partly as an atonement.

"It is a shame that Lord Chesterton should have given me this magnificent bracelet, and only that 'trifle from Paris' to you," said Aileen.

But when a cheque for five hundred pounds presented itself, the chorus of approbation was loud and unanimous, and Blanche's mind, wrapped in a christening robe, was lost in a sea of Valenciennes and embroidery.

CHAPTER IX.

“MAMMA,” said Janet, a few days after this, “are you going to return Lady Chester’s visit?”

“No, my dear, certainly not. It was very proper of her to call, as she thought herself obliged to us for shelter from that rain, and as for her kindness to little Charlie, it passes all belief, except that everybody loves that child, but she don’t want me as a visitor, and a nice figure I should be in her drawing-room. Why there’s been as many as eight or ten carriages there the two last afternoons, with such fine people in them. That Duchess’s carriage is always there. I should be more out of place there, than the Baroness was here.

“That awful Baroness!” said Rose, “Charles says she is to arrive at Marble Hall to-morrow for good, did not you, Charles?”

“I said she was coming to stay—*good* I never anticipate, and in this case I anticipate considerable evil. She is too prosperous to enter into my feelings. Look! what she sent me to-day.” And he brought from an envelope black bordered to the extent of half an inch, four tickets of the brightest blue, ornamented with Cupids performing most dangerous antics on diminutive rosebuds. “Tickets for a picnic, the Lord Mayor’s barge, and a band, and probably dancing; in fact, everything most repugnant to my tastes and habits—the Baroness should have a little more tact,” and he almost groaned as he detailed this pointed affront to his reputation for complete broken-heartedness.

“To be sure, my dear, it was rather thoughtless; but you see, she meant well, for the tickets are marked at a guinea each. It was a handsome idea; though why she should spend four guineas to make you do what you don’t like, I cannot see.”

“Is it possible?” slowly murmured Willis, “can any one be so blind to the sordid side of human nature and picnics? Ma’am, I am to pay her for them, that is, if I had kept them, I should have paid. She is a patroness, and has so many tickets she *must* dispose of, and she wished to pass four of them off on me, that’s all,” and he replaced them in the black envelope which contained a note in still deeper mourning, which note conveyed to the Baroness a stern intimation that “Mr. Willis never (two dashes under never) joined any (one dash) party of Pleasure, and was quite (two more dashes) unequal to the gaieties of a picnic.” He looked at his note with a satisfied air of finished despondency.

“Miss Janet,” said Charlie’s nurse, presenting herself, “Lady Chester’s compliments and she’d be much obliged if you would step in for a few minutes, if not ill-convenient.”

“Nothing the matter with Charlie, is there?” said Janet jumping up. The two young aunts doted on that child.

“Bless your heart, no, Miss! except that

he's in a fair way to be utterly spoiled. Missus telled me to keep him out of the way, as my Lady was so kind about the garden; but Law, first one and then another comes, and the tall gentleman with the moustache who is there for everlasting, wanted to put him cot and all into a boat and give him a row; but I thought he might be drowned like; and I knowed I should be sea sick, so I said, no; and now, Miss, will you come?"

"Must I go Mamma? That poor Mrs. Thompson is dismissed from the hospital to-day, and she has not a friend nor a relation in the world, and I promised to go and see her, and consult with the matron as to what could be done for her.

"Is she a widow?" asked Willis.

"Yes, her husband was drowned, and she met with some dreadful accident, and has been in the hospital for three months."

"Well, in consequence of her bereavement, I will give you the price of one of these tickets," said Willis, who was in high good humour at the notice taken of his child, and

with himself for the dignified rebuke he had given the Baroness. "Yet money is no consolation."

"Oh, is not it?" interrupted Janet, "you would not say so, if you saw some of those poor creatures crying when they leave the hospital because they have no home to go to. I am sure I am very much obliged to you, Charles, your guinea will be such an assistance to that poor woman. Mamma, if I have not returned from Pleasance in a quarter of an hour, will you take it to her?" and so saying she departed.

She was shown into Blanche's boudoir, who apologized for having sent for her, but "We," she said, pointing to a tall distinguished-looking woman, very simply dressed, who was sitting by her, "are much interested about two or three poor women in the hospital here, and Mr. Greydon says that you know them all, and can give us more information about them than he can."

Janet's heart beat with delight. Mr. Greydon's praises were as unexpected as they were

delightful, and she keenly felt, too, the possibility of benefitting some of her favourite protégées. Mrs. Thomson's case was considered and relieved, an asylum procured for a young crippled orphan, and "Clara" as the dignified friend was called by Lady Chester, said she had heard much from the poor patients of Miss Hopkinson's assiduity in visiting and reading to them, and how they enjoyed hearing her and her sister sing.

"Oh, *do* you sing?" exclaimed Blanche, "I have not heard a song for ages, you must give me one."

"You would not call mine singing, Lady Chester," said Janet, smiling, "my sister and I have had very little instruction, and have scarcely ever heard any real music; but we have taught ourselves a few chants and hymns, and some old fashioned ballads, which please our poor sick friends, but I doubt if they would please anybody else. We moved our pianoforte into the back room when you came here, for fear our noise should disturb you."

The Dead March in Saul, struck its melancholy old chords on Blanche's conscience, but she remembered that it was played with great expression, and again she begged Janet to sing, and opened the pianoforte; but Janet said that an accompaniment was not necessary for the little she could do, and that little was not worth asking for twice. So without the slightest shyness she began 'Old Robin Grey,' in a rich sweet voice that astonished her hearers. She seemed to be reciting the story, rather than singing the song, with a degree of pathos that overpowered them; and just as the heroine's heart was 'like to break,' a sob from Lady Chester put an end to her griefs, and to Robin's hopes, and Janet's ballad.

"What is the matter, Lady Chester?" she exclaimed.

"Why, your singing, child; it's worse than the 'mither that did not speak,' for breaking hearts. It is the most touching thing I ever heard. Now is it not, Clara?"

But Clara was wiping her eyes, and did not answer.

“Dear Miss Hopkinson, what a gift that voice of yours is; it would be so kind if you would let us come sometimes and hear you and your sister practice. Is her singing equal to yours?”

“Rose sings much better than I do,” said Janet simply, “and if you really think it would amuse you, and are not saying these kind things merely to please me, I am sure we should both be delighted to come and sing to you whenever you like. We are expecting dear papa home next month,” she added, her eyes sparkling with delight, “and he is so fond of all these old ballads, that we are very musical just now. If you have nothing more to ask about the hospital, Lady Chester, I should like to go there now, to tell Mrs. Thompson and Ellen Smith what will make them so happy; and I will just run first into the garden, and send little Charlie home, I cannot tell you how much mamma feels your kindness to our poor little darling.”

“He *is* a darling,” said Blanche

“And a great pet of mine,” added Clara.

“ My carriage is at the door, Miss Hopkinson, and I will put you down at the hospital ; while you send your little nephew home, I will put on my bonnet, and we will meet you in the hall.”

“ Oh, thank you,” said Janet, “ then I am sure of being in time for Mrs. Thompson,” and she ran hastily down stairs.

“ Now that is what I call a pleasing girl,” said the Duchess, “ not shy, nor awkward, and yet not forward ; and she is evidently spending her quiet little life in doing all the good that comes within her means. Then her singing ! My dear, I am ashamed of myself. I began to fancy that the Duke was old Robin Grey, and that I must have jilted some Jamie for him. You and Aileen, Blanche, have escaped being *fast*—”

“ Thanks to Aunt Sarah,” said Blanche.

“ And thanks to your own good sense and taste ; but if you could see some of the young girls who have hardly been out a year ! their forward manners, the way in which they talk upon subjects, which even now I should be

ashamed to allude to—their careless manners to their mothers, and their extraordinary self-sufficiency—you would be shocked. That unaffected quiet girl is quite refreshing. I think I shall cultivate the Hopkinsons, Blanche.”

In the hall, the Duchess found Janet, who, at the sight of the carriage, became aware of her companion's rank, and rather regretted the bold measure she had taken, in accepting a drive with an unknown friend. She did not know precisely how to address her; had visionary ideas of saying your Grace, which she rejected as plebeian; and then wondered at herself for having sung to a person whose concerts were constantly mentioned as the finest in London. “However,” as she told Rose afterwards, “the Duchess was not half so grand as Baroness Sampson, and quite unlike her; and when I have said that, it shews why I found myself talking to her about you, and mamma, and the poor people; just as I should to any of our own friends; and when we reached the hospital, I could not

help begging her to come in, that she might tell those poor women herself what arrangements she had made for them. It was so nice to hear her talk to them, and then she is able to do so much for them. How pleasant it must be to be very rich. And then Mr. Greydon came in," added Janet, blushing, and do you know she told him of my singing, "and he said he had never had the good fortune of hearing the Miss Hopkinsons sing, except at church, and she said he had then a great pleasure to come. She wanted to bring me home. Again I thought of the Baroness and her rudeness to dear mamma; but of course I preferred walking. Mr. Greydon walked part of the way with me." And then there followed a pause, the fact was too important to be mixed up with meaner subjects, and Mr. Greydon's remarks on the promising crops, and the prevalence of whooping cough in the school, and the slight improvement of little Charlie, were put by for private rumination. They were too sacred to be imparted even to Rose.

CHAPTER X.

“I HAD a funny note this morning from your friend the Baroness, Willis,” said Mrs. Hopkinson. “It appears she has got into some dispute with Randall, and she, rather coolly, asks me to come and look over the inventory with him, as she cannot trust her servants, and is not accustomed to that sort of drudgery herself. Now I am sure I like to be neighbourly, but I do not see why I am to drudge for Baroness Sampson, and I don’t want to get into a quarrel with Randall.”

“Of course not, ma’am. You are quite right. It is an object with *me* to keep well with the Sampsons, and I suppose she thought naturally enough, that *my* family would be civil to her. She is disappointed. That

is not of the slightest consequence. Poor woman! She has only just discovered the macaw. She says she never would have taken Marble Hall, if she had been aware of that nuisance, and she thinks Randall ought to have told her, and wants him to get rid of it; but he not only says, he does not know where it is, but that he thought it sounded very cheerful. Ah well! it's all of a piece with the rest of life, as I tell her. Incivility your only help, and a macaw's scream your only harmony. Life! life!"

"Law, my dear, don't talk in that way. I did not mean to be uncivil."

"So I told her ma'am, when she said how much your note had surprised and distressed her. I assured her you did not *mean* any incivility, and that indeed I felt certain that from the melancholy tie which binds you and me, that you could not have *intended* to annoy any friend of mine, and Miss Monteneros agreed with me. I had meant to have dined at Marble Hall, it will be a convenience to me in that sort of way, but it is in such

confusion that I must go back to my solitary home.”

Mrs. Hopkinson looked consternated at the view presented to her of her conduct, and professed her willingness to go instantly to Marble Hall, and make herself of use, a concession that Willis accepted simply with a sigh—the true Willis sigh, to be had only of the inventor. The girls, who did not at all approve of his selfish management of their mother, said that as she had already refused, she could not go now unless a new request were made for her services.

“It has been made through me. I told Miss Monteneros I should go and fetch her.”

“And who, upon earth, is Miss Monteneros?” said Rose.

“Baron Sampson’s niece, a very rich heiress and a charming girl.”

This was said severely, and intended to make his sisters-in-law feel that *they* were not to be ranked in that category.

“Well, then, she might assist her aunt.”

Willis shook his head, murmured, “How

little you understand her," and then asked Mrs. Hopkinson if she were ready. He led his victim away in mournful triumph, leaving the girls in a high state of indignation, and with a slight hope that Miss Monteneros might eventually turn out his consoler. "And I trust she has a domineering temper," said Janet.

"And very high spirits," added Rose.

The Baroness received poor Mrs. Hopkinson very coldly. If that excellent woman had persisted in her refusal, the Baroness would probably have called on her the following day, and would have treated her with politeness as an equal. Now she saw an opening for transforming her into a slave, and a tame slave would be a useful addition to her establishment. Marble Hall was certainly in a great state of confusion—the butler and housekeeper at open war with each other, but united in their abuse of Randall; one charwoman in a vociferous state of inebriation, another suffering under a sleepy form of the same disease, a housemaid in hysterics, and

two ladies' maids drinking tea, and calmly surveying a long row of unopened imperials and cap boxes. The Baroness was scolding them all in terms of such vulgar energy, that a faint thought crossed Mrs. Hopkinson's mind that she must, at an early period of her life, have been personally acquainted with the habits and language of the offices. At all events, her manner of treating her servants was not calculated to excite either their attachment or respect. At the sight of Mrs. Hopkinson she immediately relapsed into the helpless fine lady, "Oh! you are come, I am so much obliged to Willis." Again Mrs. Hopkinson thought that a little gratitude to herself would have been an agreeable variety. "Just step into the drawing-room, and I will tell you all my difficulties, and I know, you good soul, that you will undertake them for me. You see my butler, (I took him from the Marquis Guadagni) is a very fine gentleman, and says he cannot undertake *hired* glass. He has been used to the best cut of his own, and he will have nothing to do with the

inventory, and that put it into my house-keeper's head to say the same of the china; and my maid and Miss Monteneros' will not unpack our things because they are not satisfied with the wardrobes; and then Randall will not furnish Psyche glasses, and the women that came to help are both drunk. This is really too much for even my spirits," said the Baroness, sinking into an arm-chair. "How Countess Montalbano would laugh if she saw me called upon to arrange all this *embarras*—poor me! and so now do take it all in hand, you kind creature, and see if you can make some order out of this chaos."

"I don't see much that I can do," said Mrs. Hopkinson bluntly, "I can ask Randall to send in another looking-glass or two, perhaps he may oblige me as an old neighbour, and I can recommend one or two steady char-women in place of those you have; but you must get rid of the others first."

"Ah, yes!" said the Baroness sinking deeper into her languor, "those creatures must go. Would you kindly send them

away ; and then if you would just run over the inventory with Randall, it would help my butler and housekeeper out of the dilemma in which they have placed themselves.”

This was too much even for the goodnature of Mrs. Hopkinson, who was as nearly being angry as ever she was in her life ; and at all events, it swept away all concern for Willis’ feelings towards the Sampsons.

“ Well they must remain where they have placed themselves, if it depends on me to help them out of it. I am happy to say I know nothing about fine servants and their ways. Mine do what I tell them, and there is an end of it ; and I would advise you, Baroness, to tell yours that if everything is not arranged in the course of the afternoon, you will send them all away in the evening. If they obey, there is an end of your troubles ; if not, there is an end of your servants, and a good thing too.”

“ And about the inventory ? ” said the Baroness, making a last attempt to treat Mrs. Hopkinson as a dependant.

“I have no doubt is all right. If not, that young lady perhaps could see to it.”

“Me!” said Miss Monteneros, opening her very large eyes, and dropping the glass with which she had been surveying her aunt and Mrs. Hopkinson.

“Rachel taking an inventory!” said the Baroness, with a scornful laugh, “that is not very likely.”

“No, indeed,” said Willis, “I am sure she is not equal to these household cares.”

Again Rachel surveyed them through her glass, and then turning away, murmured

“Ye household cares, vex not my mind
With your inglorious strife,
Nor seek in sordid chains to bind
My free æsthetic life.”

“Oh dear, that poetry!” said the Baroness, who was thoroughly out of sorts, “am I never to hear anything else?”

“You never heard that before, Aunt. I composed those lines while you and your friend were transacting business. What

would become of us," she said, in a sort of caressing manner to Mrs. Hopkinson, "without that meaning word æsthetic? Does not it express all and everything?"

"It may, my dear," said Mrs. Hopkinson, who could not help laughing at Rachel's drawling manner; "but I never heard it before, and do not know what it means now. If you had said asthmatic, I should have understood you at once; and now I must wish you all good morning, my girls will be expecting me."

The Baroness coldly said good-bye: the young lady seemed dreamingly disposed, and Willis, who was half ashamed of his friends, condescended to escort his mother-in-law, and withdrew rather stately.

"Now there!" said the Baroness, "I do believe that woman is affronted. She really gives herself airs, not that I care, provided she does not influence the precious Willis—the morose son-in-law."

"A little more than kin and less than kind," interposed Rachel.

“Now do give up that nonsensical habit, it has lasted a week and I am sick of it, and what is more, it does not take with Willis, and I tell you once more, that it is of immense importance to the Baron to to” she was puzzled with the Baron’s schemes, and perhaps ashamed to put them into words. “In short, Rachel, Mr. Willis must be—”

“Taken in Aunt Rebecca?” she looked fixedly at her Aunt and saw her shrink, but the Baroness rallied, and said

“He must be civilly treated and made to feel that we are his real friends, and I must insist on your making our house agreeable to him.”

“I cannot possibly combine the two very distinct ideas of Mr. Willis and agreeableness; and if you object to my poetical vein, I am lost. You told me he was sentimental, and I had collected a splendid set of quotations, adapted to that state of mind, and now ‘my tongue must be a stringless instrument.’ What next Aunt?”

“There is no use in attempting to make you hear reason,” said the Baroness, who was in a towering passion, to the great delight of Rachel; “your uncle will be extremely angry, and now, as that tiresome woman will not help me, I must go and settle the house somehow. The Baron wants to give a great fête next week, and then there is that water-party, and half the tickets are still on my hands, and none of the arrangements made; and *you*—what are *you* as a help? lying on a sofa reading poetry—more of an encumbrance than a help.”

“Thank you, Aunt. At all events it is a blessing to be something, if it be only an encumbrance; and as you are going up-stairs, will you ask the maids, if they have not drunk all the tea, to bring me a cup?”

There was a slight approximation to a bang, in the manner in which the Baroness shut the door; but when it was closed, Rachel's whole expression and manner altered, her half insolent, half sleepy looks vanished, and the repressed air of drollery which characterised

her countenance changed to a look of anxiety, as resting her head on her clasped hands, she seemed to give herself up to deep and painful thoughts. She was trying to realize her position, days of childhood came before her—a home, a mother, young affections, strong and cherished, and then a blank—parents, brother, all swept away, and she the ward of Baron Sampson. Not a burden, for she inherited the wealth, that to one so young was valueless ; but no longer the child of Home, not uncared for, but unloved. Her school days had not been unhappy ; she found warm friends in some of her companions, and an able guide in her instructress, and by her own desire she remained at school till she was nineteen. Then the Baroness claimed her with an unaccountable eagerness. She was courted, flattered, petted ; but the instincts of youth are even clearer than the experience of age. She *felt* the falseness of the atmosphere in which she lived, all was false, the Baron's courtesy, the Baroness's caresses, the attentions of Cousin Moses. " We

are all actors and actresses," she used to say, "and none of us quite up to our parts, though we act all day long."

This went on for two years. A month ago she came of age, and on her birthday, her uncle presented her with a splendid *parure* of opals and diamonds, ("false, of course," she thought to herself) and, at the same time, requested her to sign some dreary looking parchments, which he called "releases—mere forms; but they relieve me from all responsibility with regard to your fortune, and they make you a very independant young lady." From that day the tone of the family had visibly changed, she felt she was treated with neglect, more as the poor relation than the wealthy ward, and there was less disguise practised as to the Baron's speculations and money matters.

The manner in which she had been almost ordered to decoy Willis into the house had awakened suspicions, which her Aunt's change of countenance, when jestingly taxed with deceiving him, had confirmed; and she was

now bringing herself to the conviction that the Baron's wealth was another falsity, and that her fortune had been, by some artifice, connected with those parchments, placed in his power. "And I have not a relation nor a friend at hand whose aid I can demand, I live in a prison disguised as a palace, and take my share in the foolery that is to deceive the bystanders. But I will not lure others into the ruin that may have overtaken me. If that man's eyes cannot be opened, his mother shall be warned. How that woman's honesty warmed me, I could have hugged her. I think I like my Aunt better since she has become openly uncivil, there is truth in that, and I suppose I shall have enough of it to satisfy me."

But there she was mistaken. The Baron arrived from the city and was for some time closeted with his wife, and when they all met at a very uncomfortable dinner, the old caressing manners were resumed. Rachel was, "dear child," and "lady fair," and "sweet thing," at every moment, and when

the ladies withdrew, the Baroness was in fits of laughter at herself. "Those horrid servants had so annoyed her, that she supposed she must almost have lost her temper, and certainly must have lost her senses when she spoke as she had done to her little Rachel; such a dear, and so amusing with her funny little quotations—the Baroness delighted in them, and would not miss one for the world."

"'The world is a huge thing, a large price for a small vice.' That is from Othello, Aunt."

"You clever creature, what talents you have! The Baron always says you are the shrewdest woman he ever saw, it would be impossible to deceive you."

"Then some deceit is intended," was the shrewd woman's thought, and she made up her mind to watch.

CHAPTER XI.

WILLIS and Mrs. Hopkinson walked for some time in silence, and then she suddenly said,

“I don’t like those people, Charles ; I do not mind their rudeness to me. I suppose I look like a respectable housekeeper, and she thinks I am one, that does not matter ; but I do not quite make out what *they* are. What do you know of them, my dear ?”

“He is one of the wealthiest men in the city,” said Willis apologetically, for he was rather nettled that *his* mother-in-law should have been treated cavalierly, “and she is a very fine lady.”

“Very fine, my dear, but not a lady, take

my word for it ; I don't mind her not being ladylike in manner, nor indeed in look, which to my thinking she is not, but I hate her pretences."

"Pretentions, ma'am, you mean."

"No, I don't, Charles, I know what pretentions are, we all have them ; I mean pretences. Her helplessness, her ignorance, her nerves are all pretence, and before you have any dealings with that family in money matters—speculations I think you call them—I would advise you to know a little more of their history."

Willis was rather appalled at this. He had a great opinion of Mrs. Hopkinson's stirling sense, and he had an instinctive idea that her advice was good, but it came too late. He had already, to some extent, embroiled himself in the Baron's schemes, and was on the point of embarking in a larger joint speculation. That he might avoid, and he determined to take his mother-in-law's counsel, though of course, with a murmur at her for offering it.

On their arrival at home, they found that Janet and Rose were at Pleasance. Mrs. Hopkinson read a note from Lady Chester, which they had left on the table, and shewing it to Willis said, "Now I call that the note of a lady. She wants to hear them sing together, and wishes Lady Sarah to have that pleasure, too; but she hopes they will not think of coming if they have any engagement whatever, but name some other time, and she invites me to come too."

"What is all this about the girls' music. *Do they sing well?*" asked Willis, who could not have distinguished God save the Queen from an Irish jig if his life had depended on it.

"I am sure I don't know if they sing well or not, they sing to amuse themselves, and to please me; and it's an odd kind of pleasure, too, for sometimes I sit and cry like a baby, when I listen to words about the deep sea and the wild waves roaring; but then, of course, I am thinking of John, and perhaps it is that that moves me, and yet there is

something very particular in their voices, too, poor dears."

"Are you going to them, ma'am?"

"No, my dear, they are all young at Pleasance, and don't want me. I had rather hear all about it from the girls."

And when they returned, they had so much to tell, that they interrupted each other every ten words, then talked both together, and then stopped and tried to start fair again with their news.

"Oh, mamma! what do you think? You have seen Colonel Hilton ride by?" said Janet.

"The tall officer who has taught Charlie—" said Rose.

"To call him Moustache," interrupted Janet.

"Who is brother to the Duchess of St. Maur—"

"And the Duchess of St. Maur is his sister."

Then they both added together, "And he is going to be married to Miss Grenville."

“One at a time,” said their mother laughing. “Well, a wedding is a nice cheerful incident to my mind—and did you see the lovers?”

“Yes, Colonel Hilton is, what Lady Chester calls, *Fanatico per la musica*, quite mad for music, and he did so admire Janet’s ‘Ruth.’”

“And he said Rose had one of the best contralto voices he ever heard; and the Duchess was there, and oh, mamma, this is the nicest thing of all, she has actually asked us,” and then they both spoke together, “to a morning concert at St. Maur House, to hear Piccolomini and Giuglini and all the great singers we have read about in the paper.”

“You don’t say so, my loves, but you two can’t go alone amongst all that crowd of great people.”

“Oh! but she asked you, too, here is the card, she brought it with her—Mrs. Hopkinson and the Miss Hopkinsons.”

Poor Mrs. Hopkinson did not respond at all to the radiant looks of her daughters, she was grieved to disappoint them; but the

notion of going to a large London party was one she could not entertain for a moment, and so she sorrowfully told them.

“I was afraid you would not like it, dearest old mammy, and so we did refuse at first, but then Lady Chester (she *is* so nice and so pretty, and so everything that she ought to be) said that Lady Sarah was to chaperon Miss Grenville, and that we might go with them in her carriage; so if you have no objection, we should like to go.”

“No objection at all to that,” said Mrs. Hopkinson, clearing up instantly. “Only think if your father were to come home that day, and to hear that you were at a concert at St. Maur House—he *would* be surprised! Why the Queen goes there, and though of course she will not be asked to meet you—I mean you would not be asked to meet her, still you are going to a house where you might have met Her Majesty.” And Mrs. Hopkinson’s loyalty waxed warm at the possibility.

Dress was the next subject of discussion,

but Janet and Rose thought Lady Chester was so good-natured, they might venture to ask for her directions on that point, so that consideration was deferred; and Mrs. Hopkinson narrated her morning experiences, which filled her daughters with indignation, and they issued peremptory orders to their mother, never to go to Marble Hall again.

“Poor Willis!” added Mrs. Hopkinson, “I suppose he is an unlucky man, as he says. He is certainly not fortunate in these friends, the niece was the best of the set, though I did not understand what she was talking about, and she is pretty too.”

“Does Charles think so?” said Janet.

“Charles? I never thought to ask him. Why bless me, girls!” Mrs. Hopkinson added, after a pause, “you don’t mean to say that poor Willis will ever look up again after his sad loss—that he will ever think of a second wife. To be sure, I have no right to speak; I had been a widow only two years when I married your father; but then I was young and gay, and between ourselves, children, my

poor dear first was not a man to grieve for long. Eh, dear! we all have our faults, and he certainly had a good many. And somehow I was not very happy with him, but it is all made up to me now, and perhaps he meant well."

If so, he had certainly failed singularly in acting up to his intentions, for he had treated his young wife brutally; and as there is no reason to suppose that the fall from his tandem, which terminated his dissipated life was a voluntary act, or in any way meant as a kind attention, or an atonement—it was charitable of Mrs. Hopkinson to endow him with even a limited amount of well meaning.

CHAPTER XII.

THERE was to be a school feast at Dulham. This is a modern innovation, which may be productive of a certain amount of happiness, and is, at all events, well intended on the part of those who furnish the tea and the buns, and the steamer and the vans ; but there is always something suspicious, to my mind, in the little shrill hurrahs, which are kept up by the youthful tea drinkers, at intervals during the whole day, to say nothing of their being rather unmusical. It may not be so, but sometimes it appears as if the five or six charitable gentlemen in black coats, and the equally charitable ladies in black gowns, who conduct the festivity, order the cheers, as well as the cheer ; and that the hurrahs are *des*

houras de commande. However, this is being hypercritical. The Dulham children were not to be paraded to a tea execution in procession. Mr. Greydon had asked for the use of the Pleasance lawn and garden, which was willingly accorded by its inhabitants, who delighted in the sights and sounds of childish merriment. They had no anti-hurrah feelings, Aunt Sarah came out strong on these occasions; she told little stories to the children, which made them laugh; she brought a provision of toys and sweetmeats, which were hidden in the most ingenious places, in thick shrubs, in wheel barrows full of leaves, in Charlie's cot, and one great prize was discovered in Aunt Sarah's netting case. Mrs. Hopkinson, who felt she would not be out of place on this occasion, was invaluable; she had known most of the children from the day of their birth, and had an individual knowledge of their ailments and their tempers, and their frocks and bonnets, and their little brothers and sisters, that made them familiar with her, and she could not walk across the

lawn without half a dozen clinging to her skirts. Some of the young ladies of the parish came in the capacity of school-teachers, and Mr. Greydon, who brought several of his assistants, was absolutely frisky; running races, and flying kites, and cutting bread and butter in slices of astounding thickness—Janet thought that no loaf had ever before been so well divided.

Even Mlle. Justine was condescending; she thought this “*fête du village très-intéressante*,” and withdrew her hands from her eternal apron pockets, to assist in tea making; and Baxter deigned to carry one of the benches that had been sent up from the school half across the lawn. While the sports were at their height, they were suddenly suspended by the appearance of the Lord Mayor’s barge coming majestically up the River, flags flying, band playing, &c., &c. Either from the attraction of the crowd of children at Pleasance, or from the natural impulse to stick in the mud, which is the general characteristic of boats, it came to, just opposite the house.

The children assembled on the bank, and greeted it with spontaneous cheers, and Rose and Janet following to prevent them falling into the river in a mass, were met by the sight of Willis moving majestically and sadly through the mazes of a quadrille. They were speechless with astonishment. If the monument had suddenly made them a low bow, or if the great bell at St. Paul's had made a flippant remark in good English, it would not have seemed more unnatural than Willis dancing with a handsome looking girl, dressed in the smallest of bonnets and the yellowest of gowns.

“Grey gloves too, and no crape on his hat,” said Rose, “he must be very near a proposal.”

They fetched their mother to see this preternatural sight; and when Willis came to a triumphant termination of the grand rond, and was making a stiff bow to Miss Monteneros, he found himself confronted by his mother and sisters-in-law, and felt that the power of his gloom, the charm of his misery

had passed away for ever, he could not subside from that last *chassé*, stiffly as it was performed, into the bowed-down mourner.

Surprise had been felt on shore, but there was equal surprise on board. The Baroness who was doing the patroness, full of majesty, and also doing Cleopatra, minus the Nile, suddenly roused herself from a very effective attitude, and beckoning to Willis, said, in an agitated voice, "Who is that leaning on Mrs. Hopkinson's arm?"

"Lady Sarah Mortimer, ma'am."

"And the gentleman offering chairs to your sisters-in-law—two gentlemen indeed?"

"One is Colonel Hilton, who is to marry Miss Grenville, and the other is, I think, her brother."

"Well, upon my word, they are free and easy young ladies, talking and laughing with those young men as though they had known them all their lives. This school feast has been a great introduction for them," said the Baroness spitefully. "I believe, in these days, a little attention to the poor is not a bad

speculation." The Sampsons were always speculating.

"The Miss Hopkinsons are a great deal at Pleasance," Willis said stiffly, "Lady Chester is constantly inviting them."

"Dear me! I wish I had known that sooner," said the Baroness, "I had no idea that they were at all in our set, or I would have phrased a little note I sent to them this morning differently."

She had actually written in a fit of superb impertinence, to say that she had a *déjeuner dansant* on the 16th, and that if Mrs. and the Miss Hopkinsons liked to see it, they would have a good view of the company from some of the upper windows.

"Do, my dear Willis, explain to them that I had no idea that they would like to join in my little fête, but that I shall be happy to see them *as guests*. It will be very gratifying if Lady Chester and I, between us, bring these girls into society; so mention that I will receive them *as guests*; in fact, I will send them a regular card." She seemed to think that

after that, life had no further distinction to hope for.

“You can do as you like,” said Willis stiffly; the Sampsons were sinking hourly in his estimation; “but I know they cannot come on the 16th. They are going to a morning concert at the Duchess of St. Maur’s.”

“At St. Maur House? a subscription concert of course; I am sorry now I fixed my fête for the 16th. I should have been happy to have taken tickets, and I shall feel quite distressed if my *réunion* should interfere with the Duchess’s charitable intentions. It was very thoughtless of me to take her day. I am sure it is very kind of her to lend St. Maur House; I can’t think how it is that she and I have never visited, but we have not. I should have liked this opportunity of taking your sisters, Willis, if I had been going.”

Willis was becoming frightfully clear-sighted to, what Mrs. Hopkinson called, the Sampson pretences, and received as much

pleasure as it was in his nature to feel, in baffling them.

“Lady Sarah Mortimer takes them ; and it is not a subscription concert, only one of the Duchess’s morning fêtes ; begins at three, I think the card said.”

A card ! a private party ! Lady Sarah for a chaperone ! the Baroness was absolutely silenced by astonishment and vexation at her mistaken treatment of the Hopkinsons. Rachel looked amused, and viewing through her glass the groups on the lawn, observed that their picnic seemed to be going off successfully. This roused Baroness Sampson to a sense of her patroness duties. Various young men were dispatched with peremptory messages to the red-coated bargemen, and finally the boat was induced to move slowly on, the band of course playing “*Partant pour la Syrie*,” a point of the globe the Lord Mayor’s barge was most incompetent to reach.

“Now, Aunt,” said Blanche, who had withdrawn with Lady Sarah to her own quiet

room, "don't you think I am behaving very well, and that I am improving in habits of self-command? You have not seen any signs of fretting, and yet I am very unhappy. Arthur did not write kindly, did he?"

"He wrote under a misapprehension, caused by his father's letter; and twenty-four hours later when he would have received the news of Aileen's engagement, he would certainly be much more unhappy than you are, my love, that he had been unjust to you. But I will own that you have borne this injustice wonderfully, and that my Blanche *has* improved in the art of self-control. And I have been thinking, my child, that you may soon see good come out evil. Arthur will be so afraid of your fretting, and so ashamed of his pettishness, that I should not be at all surprised if he set off instantly to come home."

"Oh, Aunt Sarah! do you really think so? but then that wicked Mr. Armistead—who is clearly a very unprincipled man, and does not care about his wife—will never let Arthur off from that journey to Prague, now

that he has made him promise to go. He will think it great fun to part Arthur and me, because he and his wife cannot agree."

"I have known the Armisteads for some years," said Aunt Sarah quietly. "Some people think him rather too evangelical, but that is no business of ours ; he does a great deal of good in a quiet way, and he makes his giddy little wife, who has no harm in her, very happy. She told me the other day, with tears in her eyes, that she never knew what goodness was till she married Mr. Armistead. You know what her own home was. And so as I was saying," pursued the old lady without raising her eyes from her netting, "I expect that in a very short time we shall have Arthur here—perhaps to-morrow."

"Oh, Aunt Sarah!" said Blanche, throwing her arms round her Aunt's neck, "you know more than you tell me ; you have heard from Arthur, you are sure he is coming ; perhaps he is here," and she started up as if to go and meet him.

“ My dear, dear child,” said Lady Sarah taking her by the arm, “ will you be a little more reasonable, and above all, will you sit down quietly on the sofa, I have *not* heard from Arthur ; but just before I came here, Mrs. Armistead came pirouetting into my room, and said she was furious with Lord Chester, who had made poor dear Armistead give up his Prague journey, and that they were probably coming home together directly. That little goose pretended to be in despair, that her plan of going alone to Brighton was at an end ; but as she danced, and laughed, and sang scraps of French songs, and was overflowing with spirits, I imagine that she is not sorry to have her grave husband at home again. I did not mean to tell you this, thinking you would rather learn it from Arthur’s letter to-morrow, but now you know all that I know. Of course Mrs. Armistead had forgotten to look at the date of her letter.”

“ Oh ! never mind dates. Now I am happy. They will be here soon—soon is a charming

word, and as for Arthur's letter, I suppose I ought to be flattered by his jealousy, but I mean to be very dignified at first, Aunt."

"Very well, my dear; we shall see."

"I really must, upon principle. It would never do to let Arthur get into a habit of mistrust, and to think of his saying he was going to Prague, when he never meant it!"

"That journey may pair off with yours to Berlin, dear. But listen now to that song. How well those girls manage their voices."

The school children were all at tea, too much occupied with buns and muffins to make any noise, and Mr. Greydon who seemed exhilarated by the day's work, suggested to Janet that it would be a good opportunity to give him the pleasure the Duchess had promised him of hearing her sing. If he had proposed to her to ride a steeple-chase, she would have attempted it, so she and Rose performed an echo song, the one sister concealing herself, and repeating from a distance, the clear notes of the other—the effect was

perfect. Even Colonel Hilton and Aileen, who had retreated from the school-child world, to a solitude in which they might uninterruptedly talk *to* each other *of* each other, abandoned their seclusion, and drew to the window in which Blanche's sofa was placed.

The long evening shadows were beginning to chequer the bright lawn, the still river, "one burnished sheet of living gold" reflected with unbroken clearness, the picturesque barges that floated lazily by, and the bright pleasure boats that stayed their rapid oars, at the sound of the music from the garden. The summer air, rich with the perfume of the magnolias, breathed softly over all this beauty. It was a scene that might have made a philanthropist of Timon. Even the bargemen refrained, for the time, from the stream of oaths which seem to be their idea of common conservation, and if they swore at all, swore blandly and benevolently. Aunt Sarah actually suspended her netting, and as the last notes of the song died away, Blanche drew a long breath and said, "That

is too beautiful, I only wish Arthur could hear it."

"He has heard it," said a joyous voice at the door, and Blanche turning hastily round, saw her wishes realized. There was a rush and a scream, and a soothing sound of endearments, with "darlings" and "dearests" intermixed; and as Aunt Sarah precipitately fled, abandoning even her netting in the retreat, she was harassed by no fears that Arthur's sins would be visited with any undue amount of dignified coldness.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE Sampson picnic did not end with any *coup de théâtre*, but upon the whole, it might be called successful. No rain, no spoiled bonnets, the young ladies constantly dancing on deck, the old gentlemen constantly eating below, the Baroness treated as the great lady of the party—and to crown all, Willis and Miss Monteneros were much together; and considering his usual taciturnity, and her habits of disdainful mockery, the Baroness was surprised to see them occasionally engaged in earnest eager conversation. She thought it augured well, and took occasion to observe to her niece the following morning, that Willis improved very

much on acquaintance, and was a thorough gentleman. To which Miss Monteneros made the obvious Shakespearian reply that "T'was never merry world since gentlemen came up," and that she thought the general merriment of the world would not be increased by this particular gentleman.

"At all events," said the Baroness, with a sweet smile which was slightly forced, "he shows good taste in one respect, I shan't say what. I should like to show some civility to his relations, Rachel; but owing to one or two little *contretemps*, little mistakes that I made in my giddy way, I hardly know what to do."

"Or to undo," said Rachel, "for the interview with Mrs. Hopkinson and the note that followed are *des faits accomplis*. But, Aunt, as you don't want to have the Hopkinsons at your parties, and they don't want to come, why not let things remain as they are?"

"For a thousand reasons," said the Baroness, pettishly. "It would be a great

advantage to those girls to appear at my parties, and I like to do a good-natured thing." Rachel raised her glass and took a steady view of her Aunt, it seemed as if she wished to study her in an entirely new character. "And if they really sing well, they might make themselves of great use to me." Rachel's glass dropped, there was nothing new in the Baroness as she was now revealing herself. "Then if the Duchess and Lady Chester have really taken up these Hopkinsons, there would be nothing derogatory in my doing the same."

"Nothing whatever," said Rachel emphatically, "even putting the Duchess and Lady Chester aside."

"Very true, Rachel. Of course, in my position, I can choose my own society. It would be a good thing for those girls to have the entrée of my house, and if through them I am drawn into an acquaintance with their fine friends, their patronesses I ought to say, it really would make little difference to me to have to extend my visiting list. The

Chesters I look upon as neighbours, I ought to ask them; and I should not mind asking the Duchess if—”

“She would but come,” said Rachel, “but to begin at the beginning, how are the Hopkinsons to be propitiated? What do you mean to do?”

“Propitiated, indeed! when I am offering them the greatest possible civility. Why, who are they? the wife and daughter of an East Indian Captain who have somehow crept into society quite out of their line. However, the Baron heard yesterday that Captain Hopkinson has made a large sum of money in the China trade, and if he comes safe home (I, for one, expect every ship to be wrecked) the Baron wants to make his acquaintance.”

Rachel seemed to be in a fit of absence and murmured to herself. “‘If one should be a prey, how much better to fall before the lion than the wolf.’ Well, as you say, Aunt, I believe Shakespeare gets too much into my head, I am always quoting him without rhyme or reason.”

“That you certainly are,” said the Baroness sharply. “However, I adore Shakespeare myself, and only wish I had time to read him. Indeed, I went once to see his *School for Scandal*; but *revenons à nos moutons*, I was thinking that you, perhaps, could go and call on the Hopkinsons and ask them to our second *déjeuner* on the 23rd, and tell them that my list is full for the 16th; that would put everything straight.”

“No,” said Rachel, “I do not know them; I do not want to bring them into this house, and I had rather not call on them.”

“Oh! very well, take your own way; and perhaps, all things considered, I had better go myself. Ring, and order the carriage;” and the Baroness departed, rather ashamed of herself at heart, but still convinced she was doing the Hopkinsons great honour.

Her arrival disturbed a very good looking young man, who was sitting talking to Mrs. Hopkinson, and was making himself very agreeable, to judge from the sounds of laughter that met the Baroness on the stairs. He

jumped up the instant she was announced, and said that he was obliged to be on hard domestic duty the first day of his return, so he could not stay another minute. "But I could not put off coming to thank you for all your attention to my wife; and I want to know when my friend Hopkinson will be at home? Ah! he abused the poor old 'Alert,' but the 'Alacrity' seems to be the slowest tub of the two."

"Oh! you must not call the 'Alacrity' names; John says it's the best voyage he has ever made; and that he is so rich now, he shall buy a place somewhere near Portsmouth, or Plymouth, and settle down into a country house; but, bless your heart, till there's a dry deluge," (a new invention of Mrs. Hopkinson's, which she had to explain) "and the world is all land and no water, John will never be happy ashore."

"John will be happy any where, with the individuals whom he irreverently mentions ten times a-day at sea, as his old woman and his kids; and now I must bid the old woman

good morning, and request the kids to attend to the summons they have received, or my little lady will suppose I have forgotten to give her note ;” and amidst a fresh burst of merriment, Lord Chester departed.

Again the Baroness was surprised, and wondered who the distinguished looking young man was, who was on such easy terms with the family ; and she became more than ever anxious to put her acquaintance with the Hopkinsons on a better footing ; admired their room, looked at their work, and commented on the school feast. “ It was quite an event in our expedition. And, by the bye, I wish you had been with us, we had a charming picnic, and I scolded that naughty Willis for not asking you. To be sure I ought to have done it myself, but somehow I took it into my head that you were *serious*,” (there was no doubt of the fact in its literal sense at that moment, Janet and Rose were in a frozen state of dignity) “ and that you would object to our frivolous amusements. But I am so glad to hear from Willis that you do go out.

I have brought a card for my *déjeuner* on the 16th."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Hopkinson, "my girls are engaged."

"Oh! you dissipated creatures," the Baroness glanced at the looking glass, there was no card paraded there, and she began to doubt the St. Maur concert. "But if it is a dinner engagement you can still come to me for the afternoon."

The girls were determined not to gratify her curiosity, and merely said they were engaged for the day.

"Well, I hope I shall be more fortunate on the 23rd. I will leave a card to remind; and as young ladies always have some young gentlemen to whom they like to shew a little civility, I will leave another card or two. Ah! I am very discreet, I shan't mention any names you may choose to add; but when I see a charming young man sitting with two charming young ladies, I know what to think. Now I must run away, my dear Rachel will miss me. I hope Captain Hopkinson will

soon return. The Baron has heard a great deal about him, and will make a point of calling directly. Adieu, *au revoir*, on the 23rd."

"Thank you," again said Mrs. Hopkinson ; but no acceptance of the invitation was given, and when the Baroness was again seated in her carriage, she had an unpleasant impression that "poor dear vulgar Mrs. Hop," as she habitually called her, "had, in her simplicity and plainness, baffled all the flattery so adroitly offered ; and if it were possible to admit such a monstrous thought, that she somehow looked down on herself, Baroness Sampson, of Lowndes Square and Marble Hall. She was rather glad Rachel had not been present. And then she had an unpleasant surprise with respect to her when she reached home ; she found her sitting with a grey haired, astucious looking man, who was tying up a bundle of parchments, and taking his leave, assuring Miss Monteneros that she should soon hear from him.

"Who upon earth is that, Rachel?"

“Mr. Bolland, my solicitor,” she said carelessly, “but have you secured the Hopkinsons, Aunt Rebecca?”

“Of course, but what is this new fancy about a solicitor?”

“Just what you call it, a new fancy. I found on looking at my fortune, that it was unpleasantly large, and that it would give me a world of trouble if I undertook to manage it myself, so I have put it into Mr. Bolland’s hands.”

“I am sure your uncle would have been glad to save you all trouble about it,” said the Baroness in a faltering voice.

“I am sure of it, too,” answered Rachel firmly. She looked at her Aunt, whose extreme paleness seemed to touch her, for she added more gently, “My uncle has so much business on his hands, I do not wish to trouble him with mine, and money matters are always better transacted with strangers. Besides,” she added, trying to laugh, “there is something grand in the sound of a man of business—heiresses always talk of their man of

business, as a part of the property ; and as you are always telling me what a great heiress I am, I may as well have all the proper distinctions of the position. You look tired, Aunt, won't you have some tea?"

"No, I thank you, I have got a headache ; I will go and lie down, for we have company at dinner, and I must rest." She almost tottered as she left the room. Rachel, too, could hardly stand. "Poor thing," she said to herself, "she knows it all—all what ? Oh ! these horrible suspicions ! why were they ever put into my head ? and why have they become almost certainties ? Is money worth all the misery, the struggles it brings ? Those Pauls, and Strahans, and Redpaths, have more to answer for than the pecuniary ruin they have wrought. They have ruined all confidence, all trust ; they have made dishonesty the rule, and not the exception. Why did my Aunt ever marry that cold sanctimonious man ? His mere look always gave me a chill. Well, I must try to think I have done right ; Mr. Bolland was my father's friend, and his warn-

ing was well meant ; there are others, too, to be saved as well as me, else I think I would rather let my fortune go. It is not worth this wretchedness."

She heard the sound of the Baron's horses in the court-yard ; but he came so seldom into her drawing-room, that his immediate appearance there this afternoon took her by surprise. He looked harassed and heated, but greeted her with the fawning courtesy that always disgusted her.

"What, all alone, my fair niece, taking a little time, I have no doubt, for wise reflection. That is well, we men of business have too little time for thought, though I trust I neglect none of the opportunities that are given me. My happiest hours are those I spend in my library, where I can shut out all my earthly cares, and forget the world. Who is it calls it the workey day world ? Sad ! sad ! that so it is to most men. I was not meant to live in all this money-making turmoil. It distracts me. By the bye, that reminds me that one of my distractions was forgetting to

ask you to sign a paper that I ought to have given you with the others; quite a form, but a very necessary form. Perhaps I have it about me; ah yes, here it is," picking it out from a bundle of tracts, receipts of hospitals, &c. "It ought to be witnessed, I will ring for two of the servants."

"Stay, let me look at it first, Uncle."

"That's right, always look at a paper before you sign it, though whether my fashionable niece, Miss Monteneros, will be much the wiser for looking at a power of attorney, I cannot say." He put it into her hand and again laid hold of the bell-rope.

"Do not ring, Uncle, I cannot sign it to-day," and she put it into her pocket.

"Ah, not to-day! well, any day will do, but I should like to have the business settled."

"I have promised Mr. Bolland that I would not sign any paper till he had seen it," said Rachel, and she went to the window that she might not see the consternation

with which she supposed the Baron would be overwhelmed; but after a few moments' pause she heard him say in his usual bland voice :

“Ah, Bolland the solicitor—a clever man—so you have consulted him?”

“He was a great friend of my father's,” said Rachel hurriedly, and still not looking round, “and you are always so busy, Uncle, so I have put all my affairs into his hands.”

“Indeed! well, you could not have done better,” and still the voice sounded bland. “Then you may as well give me back that paper, he can be one of your witnesses when he has seen it.”

Rachel was half inclined to keep it, but she reflected that unsigned, it could do *her* no harm, whatever it could do to her Uncle, so she returned it to him. He seemed in no hurry to take it, and kept turning over the other papers that had been in his pocket; but impassive as were his looks, she observed that his hands trembled.

“Here is the paper, Uncle.”

“What paper, my dear? Oh! I beg your pardon, I had forgotten all about it. I was looking out a most interesting report on the Church Missions to Central Africa, to which you may like to subscribe. Ah, here it is, my name and subscription are made a little too prominent, I wished to have been put down merely as ‘a friend,’ but the Committee attached more weight to my name than it deserves. So here is one paper for another. Exchange is no robbery, Miss Rachel,” and he sauntered carefully out of the room.

“Oh! what is truth? and where is it?” thought Rachel, “could he really be so calm if he were attempting to rob me? I will think no more,” and she went up to dress for a large party.

CHAPTER XIV.

ARTHUR'S return infused great animation into the Pleasance life. There were all the Hilton connections and relations to be invited and feasted, and whole families of Grenvilles and Chestertons were supposed to have become suddenly possessed of the warmest feelings of friendship for all the Hiltons and St. Maurs that ever were born. Mr. Leigh, the uncle and guardian, was invited to come and talk settlements, and make difficulties which as soon as they had driven Colonel Hilton and Aileen to despair, were detected as impostor difficulties, and vanished. Mr. Leigh was so exacting in the article of pin-money, so regularly aggravating, that Colonel Hilton, who would willingly have

permitted Aileen to spend half his fortune or the whole of it, if she liked, was provoked into saying, that he did not see that she could want any pin-money at all, she could ask him for what money she required. But here Aunt Sarah's good sense stepped in, she thought it better that young married women should have a fixed income, whatever it might be called, pin-money or allowance. They knew then what they ought to spend, and all their little charities, or any presents they wished to give, would be the fruits of their own self-denial, and she even hinted that the most devoted and liberal husbands, would, after a certain term of married life, object to milliner's bills, and become possessed with an insane idea that their wives were extravagant and always asking for money. And though Colonel Hilton said it was impossible he could ever be such a brute as that, yet he thought Aunt Sarah's advice sensible, and named to her a much larger amount of pin-money than had been asked for by Mr. Leigh, "just to shew the fellow what he

could do, if he were not bullied ;” and, moreover, he felt it due to the injured feelings of himself and Aileen, to rush up to Hancock’s and secure a diamond necklace, that was on the point of being “submitted to the Empress Eugénie for approval,” that being now the favourite term for buying and selling.

Lord Chesterton came to talk Prussian politics of the most mysterious and heavy description, and tried to throw an air of modest dignity over the love making that was going on in the house. He at first attempted to follow the lovers in their rural walks, but found himself so obviously *de trop* that he resigned that occupation, with the observation, that the manners of the present day had a certain freedom which surprised him. He had never been allowed to be *tête-à-tête* with Lady Chesterton before they married ; but, of course, if Lady Sarah did not object, he supposed there was not that impropriety in these rambles, which struck his old-fashioned notions. Sir William and

Lady Eleanor de Vesie came for a few days to see their brother, though, as Sir William observed, it was an expensive time to choose for their visit, as they would be expected to make wedding presents to Aileen; and he accordingly bestowed upon her a carved wooden bread-plate, sold cheap, because it *would* spin round. As he had but thirty thousand a year, this was a handsome present for him.

There was boating on the river, and Edwin and his friends constantly rowing up to Pleasance. There were illustrious Prussians, new friends of Arthur's, generally with a *faux air* of English corporals, to be entertained—and to many of these parties the Miss Hopkinsons were invited, not for their musical talents, but for their own amusement, and they were so unaffected and so merry, that they became general favourites. There was one grand amateur musical evening, at the end of which Edwin imparted to his sisters that he thought Harcourt was smitten with Rose, and that, as he was a good sort of fellow,

and had never had any particular father and mother, he could marry to please himself, and a good contralto voice might catch him any day. Mr. Greydon, who was an old college friend of Arthur's, was a constant guest, and Janet and he became better acquainted; but it required a strong attachment and a very sanguine disposition on her side, to derive that extreme gratification from these interviews, which she found in them. However, she went on persuading herself that he liked her, and that he would show it more when he had a living, and in the meanwhile she was perfectly happy if he handed her into a boat, or put on her shawl; and there was one blissful day, when he actually went back to the house to fetch her parasol which he observed she had forgotten. That parasol never saw the light of day again, it was put into a favourite Chinese cabinet and covered with lavender, and a new and inferior one bought for common use.

“The rival parties” on the 16th, as the Baroness always called them, went off well.

An enemy, supposing it possible that the Baroness Sampson could *have* an enemy, might have said that the assemblage at Marble Hall looked like the recovery of one of the lost tribes of Israel; but there were some fine sounding names among them, foreign Counts and Marquises, several members of Parliament, radical in politics, and unpolished in manner, and who had manfully voted for the removal of Jewish disabilities. Whether they knew what the disabilities were, or what would be the effect of their removal, is doubtful; but they somehow had an idea that they were voting against gentlemen and Bishops, and Church and State, and they felt proud of themselves. Then there were their wives and daughters, decidedly not ornamental. There were a few ladies of high sounding titles, who had either risen from the ranks, or fallen into them, but the chief part of the society was decidedly second-rate.

The breakfast was magnificent; plate, wines, china, all of the finest description, and it was

evident that money was no object to the Baron, and as he averred, gave him little enjoyment. The Baroness, he said, had a feminine taste for Sèvres China or it might be Dresden, he did not know one from the other, but she pleased herself in those trifling concerns. He owned he thought that plate kept the dinner hotter, and when his friends were kind enough to come and see him, he should be sorry if they found their dinner half cold and not fit to eat. He felt it a duty, with his means, to encourage the manufactures of the country (Sèvres and Dresden!) but for himself, a mutton chop on a common white plate was all he asked.

The Baroness was in the highest spirits, loudly regretting that the Duchess of St. Maur should have carried off so many of her guests, but that circumstance had apparently left her a larger amount of condescension to divide amongst the remainder. Miss Monteneros seemed to be suffering either from a cold or the persevering attentions of Baron Moses, and was more than usually *distrait e*

and languid. Willis did not appear till so late in the afternoon, that the Baron was quite uneasy about his friend, hoped there had been no mistake about his card; (but there the Baroness reassured him,) trusted that dear little Rachel had not been cruel to her admirer, to which he met with no answer but a frown; and finally asked if it could be possible that he were gone to this grand London party, which notion threw Baron Moses into convulsions.

“Oh, my dear Sir, stop these ingenious conjectures, or you will be the death of your only son. The melancholy Jacques in the *salons dorés* of St. Maur House. *Figurez-vous* that determined chief mourner *promenant ses ennuis* amongst all that is of the gayest and the brightest.”

“Would it be any trouble to you, Moses, to speak either English *or* French?” said Rachel. “The two combined, neither of them very good of their kind, obscure your meaning—to my limited capacity, at least—and why Mr. Willis should be more misplaced at a concert than a breakfast, I do not see.”

“Well, this is something *à faire dresser les cheveux*. The beautiful and accomplished Miss Monteneros avowing her interest in the obscure and freezing Willis, Rachel—spare my feelings, *je suis jaloux comme un tigre*.”

“And habited like a tiger,” she said carelessly, as she turned away; and taking the arm of one of her school friends, several of whom had been invited to the fête, “Let us go and set the dancers off. I am in that state of mind that I could dance in desperation, or sing, or laugh, or do anything extravagant.”

“You are in one of your moods, my dear, as we used to call them at school,” answered her friend, “when you used to begin to cry just as you were making us all laugh by your gaiety.”

“‘I have a smiling face,’ she said,

‘I have a jest for all I meet,

I have a garland for my head,

And all its flowers are sweet,

And so you call me gay,’ she said,

‘Grief’s earnest, is life’s play,’ she said.”

This was Rachel's answer.

And just as the music began, the recreant Willis appeared. He hated now the very sound of the music. That one unfortunate quadrille into which he had been beguiled on board the barge, had not only lowered him from his high, disconsolate position in the world, but it had lowered him in his own eyes. He knew, in his inmost soul, that the fascinations of Rachel had lured him into that incongruous levity.

"Mary, the dear departed shade," was not only on the point of being superseded, but the figurative shade which she had thrown over him, seemed to be departing too. This would not do. He had thought it all well over during the week; Rachel was handsome, perhaps rich, though that had become a matter of doubt; and to do him justice, he was not influenced by wealth. She had shown much sense and good feeling in the advice she had guardedly given him on the day of the water-party, when she had proposed their dancing together, as a cloak to her more

serious purpose. The information she imparted had startled him. It gave him a fair promise of actual misfortune, over which he could pity himself for years to come. A thought of finding consolation in his informant crossed his mind at first; but when she had once conscientiously, and painfully warned him of the risks he ran in her Uncle's friendship, she relapsed into her usual supercilious manner, and that he did not like. He once thought of turning disappointed lover. There was a good deal that might be effective in that line, much sighing and moralizing, great scope for sneering at women and life, and a good stroke of business to be done in the way of a bleeding heart. But still this was all common-place and hackneyed to the greatest degree. Everybody had been, or would be disappointed in love, hardly anybody but himself aspired to being hopelessly miserable, and invariably unlucky. So any little vague tenderness for Rachel was quelled, his coat was once more buttoned up to the chin, a fresh crape put to his hat, his grey gloves

thrown into the fire, and leaning, with his arms folded, under a cypress tree on the lawn of Marble Hall, Willis was himself again.

“You wicked man!” said the Baroness, approaching him, “where have you been all day? there is breakfast over without you. The Baron, he does so like to see his friends enjoy themselves at his house, was actually accusing me, poor me! of making some mistake about your card. Now is that likely? I’m a giddy thing, but not so bad as that. Why the Baron could not give a fête without you.”

“I suppose not,” said Willis, with one of his slight groans, which were so habitual that the Baroness did not mark its meaning character. “Captain Hopkinson arrived unexpectedly this morning, and that detained me.”

“Oh! that excellent Captain Hopkinson. I wish you had brought him with you. And so I suppose his daughters missed their con-

cert," said the Baroness, her eyes brightening at the idea.

"No, they had been gone half an hour. It is always so, every pleasure comes exactly half an hour too late—Life ! Life !"

"*They* will not think it too late, their fine friends are everything now," said the lady spitefully. "Baron!" she called to her husband, as he walked by in earnest conversation with a gentleman who looked like the Stock Exchange taking a little recreation. "Our friend's father-in-law is come, I was reproaching him for not bringing him here."

"I should have been delighted to see him. He is, I hear, an excellent man, has prayers for the sailors every morning, and keeps up a very strict tone of morals on board his ships. And virtue has its reward even in this life—I am told he has made a most successful voyage. Willis, you must introduce him to me. He can give us useful information," he added, turning to his friend, "relative to our Chinese railway business."

"Oh, no business here, if you please !" said

the Baroness, who saw an additional shade of gloom coming over Willis's countenance, "you know I never allow that. Come, Willis, let me find you a partner."

"No—no dancing, the exertion I made in that way last week quite unhinged me. Go to your gayer friends, Baroness, and leave me here, to look on and envy the light hearted."

"No such thing, there is some charming music going on in the saloon. That will divert you, my dear friend," and so she carried off her victim to listen to a comic song.

Now, if there is one thing more than another, conducive to low spirits, it is that depressing invention—a comic song! The mere advertisements—"I'm a merry laughing girl," or "I too, am seventeen, Mamma!" if read early in the morning, particularly before breakfast, produce a degree of nausea that effects the health for the whole day. And the treat offered by the Baroness to Willis, was, to hear a young lady with a

prodigious colour, high cheek bones, and a turned-up nose, sing with what was termed “great archness,” words to this effect :

“Yes, Sir! I can waltz! I can flirt!

I’m out of the school-room at last!

Pa’ says I’m a romp, Ma’ says I am pert.

I say, I am fast! I am fast!

“We girls love a lark! It’s the men who are stiff.

Why, that little Lord John’s such a tease,

If I ask him to dance, he turns off in a tiff,

Law, Sir! that is ease! that is ease!

“I handle the ribbons! I smoke my cigar!

I polk till Aunt Jane looks aghast.

I swim like a fish! ride like young Lochinvar!

In short, I am fast! I am fast!”

This last verse illustrated by appropriate gestures of driving, riding, puffing smoke &c., was received with thunders of applause which were led by Baron Moses, and acknowledged by an imitation rustic courtesy, by the singer, Miss Corban, who, being eighteen, had quite outlived any youthful shyness. Some of the guests, who were what she

would have called "*slow*," found themselves affected with alarming fits of dejection, accompanied by a distressing tingling in the ears, and very burning cheeks.

Comic songs will occasionally produce these symptoms !

The music was succeeded by games on the lawn, that would have been called romping twenty years ago—more dancing, and a grand display of fireworks, and terminated in a magnificent supper, and much champagne ; and the guests departed impressed with the idea that the Baron's immense wealth was spent with equal liberality.

CHAPTER XV.

WHEN Janet and Rose returned from their concert, the door was opened for them by their father, and in the delight of this unexpected meeting, St. Maur House was for the time forgotten, almost in disgrace, for having taken them away just at the wrong moment. Captain Hopkinson was a particularly pleasant father, firmly and thoroughly convinced that his own children were superior to the children of all other fathers, that nobody ought to find fault with them, because, as he emphatically observed, they had no faults! It was very odd, he had carried out to India hundreds of young women, well educated amiable young women; but some had bad tempers, some were nervous,

some would flirt with the cadets, most of them were affected and all of them sea-sick. "Now my girls are nice, natural, good-humoured girls, they would not give *that*," (whatever *that* is) "for the attentions of a whole regiment of those silly boys; and the only time I gave them a trip in the 'Alacrity,' they were as steady on their pins as if they had been at sea all their lives." Janet was the shorter of the two, so at every return from his voyages he found out she had grown considerably, and as Rose was pale, he dwelt much on her blooming looks. Now that they burst upon him dressed, thanks to Madame Justine's supervision, in very becoming costumes, excited by the amusements of the day, and flushed with the delight of seeing him—he looked at them with the profoundest admiration, and when they left the room to take off their finery, he turned to his wife and said, "Well, old lady, those are not bad looking girls, by any means. Why, the Miss Wallaces, who went out to Calcutta this last time, and were thought great beau-

ties, and gave me no end of trouble, because all the young fellows on board *would* propose to them—they were not to be named in a day with our girls.”

“Law, my dear, you see them dressed out just for once in a way, and I don’t think, John, you’ll quite like the bill when you see it.”

“Oh, hang the bills, I don’t grudge them a little finery. Could not they always be dressed so, Jane? I should like to give them a walk in those gowns, one on each arm, just to see people stare.”

“Stare! I should think they well might, if they saw our girls go flaunting about Dulham in those fly-away gowns. No, it’s all very well for once in a way, as they had a fancy to hear this music; and as the Duchess was so kind as to ask them, I thought it respectful to dress them out; but we must go back to the old brown gowns, John. And to-morrow you must go and see that nice Captain Templeton, Lord Chester that was—No, is, I mean—and they are so

kind to little Charlie. What have you brought for Charlie, John?"

"For Charlie? Well! if I did not forget him altogether, I had no time for going about bazaars. Regent Street for my money if you want anything."

This was a little scene invariably enacted after every voyage. Captain Hopkinson always gave it to be understood that his family had been utterly forgotten by him from the hour he sailed; and then, when the ship came up the river, immense stores of shawls, playthings, and trinkets, came pouring out for several days—rarities from every port at which he had touched.

The girls came back in their brown gowns, and hoped "Papa would not quite despise his Cinderellas," and still he thought them very superior to the Miss Wallaces, and hugged himself in the consciousness of two Indian shawls, now in his locker, on board the 'Alacrity.' His arm-chair was brought from its banishment. Mrs. Hopkinson became so fidgetty and so red in the face if any

body sat down in "John's chair," that the girls always removed it from the drawing-room when he was away; but this evening it was replaced at the head of the table, and when they all four sat down to their evening meal, and the Captain said grace, adding thanks for his return to his dear wife and children, they all began to cry, as if the greatest misfortune had happened to them, till Mrs. Hopkinson wiping her eyes, observed, "Well, if ever there were four fools in the world, here they sit. The idea of our crying because John's come home. It's just like Willis. How poor Willis would enjoy having a good cry with us, I wish he were here."

"Indeed, I don't, mamma, it is the last thing I should like—spoiling papa's first day. I was just thinking of putting the chain over the door, and that we should all pretend to be out, or asleep if he came. And besides, we have so much to tell you. The concert was such fun, and St. Maur House is so magnificent."

“And then the music!” said Rose, “I think, mamma, they must be laughing at us when they admire our singing. If you could but have heard that duet of Piccolomini and Giuglini’s, I wonder what you would have said. It quite took away my breath.”

“Oh, I know the sort of thing,” said Captain Hopkinson, “I used to go to the Opera at Lisbon, and such a quavering, and shaking, and screaming, with great loud crashes of the orchestra at the end, enough to deafen you. When I went on board again and heard John Leary, one of our best mizen-top-men, sing “Home, sweet home,” the rest of the watch joining in chorus, I thought *that was* music, the other was only noise.”

“John Leary—he has sailed with you several times, my dear,” said Mrs. Hopkinson, who was divided in mind between the ‘Alacrity’ and St. Maur House, “he has a sweet voice; and his wife has had twins while he was away. But I dare say Pico—what’s his name—is he a man or a woman?—sings very well too. One of the twins is called

John. And, I suppose, the Duchess had not time to take any notice of you, girls?"

"But she did indeed, mamma; you know we were with Lady Sarah, and the Duchess took such care of her, and took her and Miss Grenville to some of the best places in the room, and made us sit there with them, and when she was walking by with the Duchess of Cambridge and Princess Mary, she stopped to talk to us and ask how we liked the music."

"Did she indeed?" said Mrs. Hopkinson, looking extremely pleased, "and so you saw the Duchess of Cambridge and Princess Mary quite close. Only to think, John, of our girls being at a party with their Royal Highnesses. When you came in so suddenly and asked what had become of them, you little thought they were in such company, and all just because everybody is so very good-natured. Only think, there was a Sir Somebody Something, who, it appears, asked your father to stay at his house at Garden Reach, all the time the 'Alacrity' was at Calcutta; and Lady

Chester has given Charlie such a nice little dog. And, I dare say, if the Queen had come to St. Maur House, the Duchess would have been just the same to you. People are so kind. I suppose Her Majesty did not drop in?" added Mrs. Hopkinson faintly.

"No, mamma."

"No, of course not; what with all her children, and what with making war and making peace, and giving balls and proroguing parliaments and the Government always changing, she has not much time for visiting, poor thing! I suppose you did not know any of the company?"

"Oh yes, there were Lord Chester, and Colonel Hilton, and Mr. Grenville; and Mr. Harcourt," said Janet, "got a seat next to Rose."

Captain Hopkinson thought Rose had really more colour now than her sister.

"And Mr. Greydon," said Rose, "took us to the refreshment-room, and afterwards to the carriage."

Janet drew herself up, and her father said

she was quite a tall woman now. Then the 'Alacrity' became the topic for a time, there had been gales that sounded unpleasant to the hearers, but which were gales of great merit, as proving the wonderful sailing qualities of the ship ; then in a fog she had nearly run aground off the Island of Tattyminibo, having mistaken it for the port of Tammyhominy, and no other ship could have behaved so unexceptionably under the circumstances, as she did. Mrs. Hopkinson was convinced that it was the island which was to blame, and which had come and put itself in the way ; she knew of an island in the Mediterranean or Baffin's Bay, that had played just the same trick ; and then, as she hated to hear of dangers at sea, she turned the conversation to her own doings during the day—how Lady Chester had sent for her to give her opinion upon some baby clothes that had been sent down to Pleasance ; and how she had recommended the cheapest, which were finer than any she had ever seen ; and how Lady Chester had always chosen

the dearest ; and how they had had a nice chat about nurses and babies, and Charlie ; and how she had just got home and was thinking about the Valenciennes round the mantle, when John walked in.

And at this crisis, in walked Willis, comfortably gloomy, after the Marble Hall festivities. “ All black again,” whispered Rose to her sister, “ even to his gloves ; then there has been no proposal.”

“ Or a refusal,” answered her sister, “ he will be worse than ever.”

But Willis was a different mannered man under the control of his sensible, straightforward father-in-law, than when he domineered over the good-natured Mrs. Hopkinson. Captain Hopkinson administered a large spoonful of good sense to every dose of querulousness—put aside the prospect of future grievances, as not worth consideration, and either disputed or laughed at the petty troubles of the day. Parade of real grief he looked upon as an impossibility. It was to be wrestled with alone, not forced on the at-

tention of the public. And by persisting in the supposition that Willis *must* take some interest in the interests of others, and by steadily treating him as a member of his own very cheerful family, he always brought him into a more companionable shape. Willis did not quite like it, but he succumbed. In fact, it would have been difficult to resist the influence of that cheerful-looking room and that happy family. He finally deigned to ask if the girls had been amused, and hardly sighed when Mrs. Hopkinson asked if Princess Mary's gown was blue, though she ought to have known that the court was in mourning for the Prince of Saxe Badenheim. He even gave a succinct account of the breakfast at Marble Hall, comprised in the few words that there were a great many overdressed people, that the tables were overloaded, and the ball-room over-crowded.

“In short, it was nearly all ‘over’ with you, Charles,” said Captain Hopkinson.

“With me?” said Willis, “oh, I see; a pun—I am not quick at puns. In fact, I

am not in spirits to-night." (Janet and Rose looked at each other.) "The Baroness took me to hear the singing," and he shuddered naturally, as he mentioned the comic song and the more comic songstress.

"But there is nothing dispiriting in that," said Janet, "you often hear us sing."

"Yes, so often, that it does not annoy me at all, I am quite used to it, I really hardly hear it. It does not even prevent me from attending to my book," and Willis thought that he was paying his sisters a most gratifying compliment, "but this Miss Corban screamed out her deplorable jokes, so that it was impossible to help hearing them. It was a pitiable spectacle!"

"Could you not just give us an idea, Charles, of the air, and some of the words?" said Rose.

"I! I sing a comic song! my dear Rose, do think a little before you speak. Have you ever seen anything in me, that would lead you to suppose that I *can* sing?"

"No, but I never, till the other day, saw anything in you that led me to suppose you

could dance. Singing may come next. Papa, you can't think how well Charles dances, such neat little *chassé's* and *balancé's* and his 'grand rond' was almost a round and a half. It was quite exhilarating to look at him."

Willis chafed up and down the room as Captain Hopkinson's peals of laughter hailed his saltatory triumphs, and took up his hat to go. But before he went, he announced that Baron Sampson was coming to make acquaintance with the Captain, and to gain some information that might be of importance to one of his schemes; and a twinge of conscience induced him to add, "He is rather a sanguine plausible man, and you had better take his statements, where any speculations are concerned, with a little abatement."

"He is not a bad fellow after all," said the Captain as the door closed on Willis.

"Who? poor dear Willis? Oh no! he is too tender-hearted, and cannot get over poor Mary's loss, otherwise, as I tell the girls, he would be as pleasant as everybody else." It need hardly be added that this comment was made by Mrs. Hopkinson.

CHAPTER XVI.

LORD CHESTER was delighted to meet his old friend Hopkinson again, and carried him off to see Blanche, who seemed also to look on him as an old friend; and spoke so admiringly, and kindly of his daughters, that, as Captain Hopkinson observed afterwards, it was very lucky that the girls were, perhaps, the nicest girls in the world, otherwise, all Lady Chester said, might have sounded too complimentary; but, as it was, nothing could be more discriminating and satisfactory. Then Lord Chester took him to his stables, and offered him the use of any of his riding horses—a proposal that was peremptorily declined, probably to the saving of John's life, and much to the satisfaction of the groom, who

observed that he never saw the use of putting a naval gentleman on the top of a horse, *he* never offered to go and navigate their ships, so why could not they let his horses alone. Finally, the gentlemen lit their cigars, and sauntered along the bank, where the sight of Mr. Harcourt in an outrigger roused the Captain to give some strong opinions on the dangers of the river, and the foolhardiness of young men. To those who are not like Wordsworth's primrose, "dwellers on the river's brim," it may be necessary to explain that an outrigger is an apology for a boat, and, apparently, a feeble imitation of a plank—that the individual who hazards his own life in it, is happily prevented, by its absurd form, from making any other person a sharer in his danger—that he is liable to be upset by any passing steamer, or by the slightest change of his own posture—that it is difficult to conceive how he ever got into such a thing, or how he is ever to get out of it again, and that the effect he produces on an unprejudiced spectator, is that of an aquatic

mouse caught in a boat-trap, from which he will never emerge alive, notwithstanding the continual struggle he appears to keep up.

“Well ; every man to his taste,” said Captain Hopkinson, “but so far as safety goes, commend me to a gale off Cape Horn. There is less chance of drowning, at all events. I must go home. Pray does your Lordship know anything of a Baron Sampson who threatens me with a neighbourly visit this morning ?”

“Nothing beyond his name, which figures in every corner of the paper, wherever there is a subscription or a company. He is supposed to be worth millions, but latterly I have learnt to mistrust that kind of reputation. I should not mind detaching his grey horses from the vulgar carriage, containing his flashy-looking wife, and leading them into my own stables ; but I had rather have nothing else to say to him.”

“Well, I hope he makes short visits, for I must be in town by three.”

“So must I, so I will call for you in my dog-cart, and we will go together.”

Captain Hopkinson shook his head, and said he looked upon a dog-cart as an outrigger on wheels, but still he accepted the offer, and hearing the sound of the baronial coach, hurried home.

The Sampsons came in great force, for Miss Monteneros offered to accompany her uncle and aunt, much to their surprise, as she usually declined morning visiting; and she established herself in the bow window where Janet and Rose were both busily at work embroidering a table cover, which ought to have been finished before their father's return, and at which they were now working with great zeal. Mrs. Hopkinson had of course warned John privately, it was to be a surprise, so, though he ran against it and stumbled over it ten times a day, he was nominally unaware of its existence till the girls went up to bed, when he would light a candle and stand for a quarter of an hour admiring it to his heart's content.

“Do you like that sort of work?” said Rachel, surveying both work and workers through her glass.

“Why, it is for papa,” said Janet, with an air that showed she considered that answer to be a settler.

“But its being for papa does not make the actual needle-work less tedious.”

“Does not it?” said Rose, looking at her with astonishment, “I should like to see the thing to be done for him—a dear as he is—that could possibly seem tedious. Besides, Janet and I never think anything tiresome that we work at together.”

Rachel sighed. She had come purposely to see a happy family, and even these few sentences had struck the dark chord of her life.

“Have you never had the pleasure, Miss Monteneros, of finishing off what you thought a successful piece of work to give to somebody you loved dearly?” said Janet.

“Never,” said Rachel, in a low voice, “and for the best of reasons, I have nobody

to love, I have never loved any one. My vocation is 'to roam along, the world's tired denizen, with none who bless me, none whom I can bless.' "

The girls looked at her with astonishment, and Janet, laying hold of her hand, said, "Do not talk so, it is not right, I beg your pardon, perhaps you are not speaking seriously. Nobody can exist unless they have somebody to love, and who loves them in return."

"True," said Rachel, "it is not existence, it is a myth.

" ' A dreary void,
The leafless desert of the mind,
The waste of feelings unemployed.' "

"But why not employ them?" said Rose, who was not learned in Byron, "you have a home."

"Such as it is."

"And relations."

"Such as they are. However, I did not come here to talk poetry and discontent,

some people think them synonymous. But I have passed you in your walks, I have seen you at church, you have always looked happy and contented, and I thought I should like to talk to you and to know how you contrived to be so."

"There is no contrivance in it," said Janet, laughing, "Rose and I have good health and good spirits, we have plenty to do in the schools and the hospital, we have the dearest old father and mother in the world, and a comfortable home, and Charlie to play with. What more would you have, Miss Monteneros?"

"Nothing," she said sadly. "Affection, employment, and usefulness—you have, as you say, *all*. I envy you; you are happy, I am not."

The two sisters were excited by this style of conversation. It had never come into their mind to analyze life. They took it as it came and to them it came happily; and the idea that a young prosperous handsome woman should drop in for a morning

visit, and mention casually that her life was an entire failure, either for use or enjoyment, was so novel and startling, that they hardly knew how to deal with it. They were inclined to adopt their usual resource, and to call to mamma to come and rectify the disastrous state of Miss Monteneros' existence. She would know exactly what to do. But on looking towards her, they saw she had present woes of her own, and that she was nearly annihilated by the condescension of the Baroness, and the humility of the Baron—so Janet gallantly threw herself again into the fight.

“Miss Monteneros, you must not be angry,” Rachel smiled, “of course, you are much cleverer than we are, and know a great deal more about feelings, and poetry and that sort of thing; but I do not like to hear you say you are not happy.”

“I do not like it either,” said Rachel, languidly, “but it is a fact, though, perhaps, I need not have mentioned it to you.”

“But I am glad you did, if you will let

me say what I think. Have you no nearer relations than an uncle and aunt?"

"I have no other relations whatever, my father and mother died before I was two years old, and I never had either brother or sister."

"That is sad," said the sisters, looking at each other, "but still you have a home, and since you have no one else to look to, I suppose your uncle and aunt stand in the place of parents to you; could you not—" Janet stopped, she looked at the Baron and Baroness. It seemed really a waste of words to ask if anybody could love them.

"You are honest," said Rachel, with a hollow laugh, "I foresaw that that sentence could not come to a happy conclusion."

"But people say you are very rich," said Janet, "and just think what money can do for half the poor creatures in the world, and how soon you would attach yourself to any one whom you had relieved from real distress; I assure you, Rose and I are often inclined to cry because we can do so little for sick

people or starving children, and yet they are so grateful for that little. Miss Monteneros, don't you think that if you cared about others, they would care about you?"

Rachel did not answer, but she leant over the work frame, and Janet felt a hot tear drop on her hand. But they said no more, for Captain Hopkinson came in in a great hurry apologizing for his delay—making Charlie over to his aunts, stumbling over the eternal table-cover, and begging the girls to keep their embroidered gowns out of the way of his feet.

"You see papa has not an idea it is a table-cover for him," whispered the deluded Rose.

The Baron and the sailor were a fine contrast as they stood talking together; the one, sallow, with a broad wrinkled brow, and a keen calculating eye, and having apparently speculated most of his hair off his head, his shoulders bent, his chest contracted, his manner deferential, his voice unnaturally bland, he looked yellow, as if he had never breathed

any air that was not tainted with the scent of gold. The other, tall, erect, fresh coloured, his crisp dark curls clustering over his manly looking head, and his keen blue eyes full of intelligence, giving his opinions or his information in a few words, and with a careless tone and manner that inspired confidence. He seemed to have no wish to *persuade*, and no anxiety as to the effect his assertion might make. "I suppose," thought Rachel, "my uncle might cajole me into believing what he has said; but I have faith beforehand in what Captain Hopkinson is going to say."

The conversation was gradually drawn by the Baron to foreign trade, to China, and finally to a projected Hongkong railroad. "I am delighted to obtain such valuable information from such excellent authority, I have taken a few shares in this company, not, as you may imagine, with any idea of profit. With a certain twelve per cent from our Banking Company, these railroad shares are, to me, a dead loss; but my City friends

did me the honour to wish for me as a director; and then I feel that railroads, and harbours—in fact, facilities for trade are our best means for the conversion of our Eastern brethren. Don't you agree with me Captain Hopkinson? Though these railroads may carry opium, Christianity will have its ticket too."

"I hope it may, Baron; but I am sorry to say that the Christian in the East, carries little Christianity with him. However, we must hope for the best, and now I am afraid I must leave you to the care of my wife and daughters, I am obliged to be in town at three, and have a friend waiting at the door for me."

"We must be going too," said the Baroness, rising, "we have paid a most unconscionable visit. I hope Rachel has persuaded those young ladies to honour us on the twenty-third, and to bring their music with them. We had a most delightful singer last Wednesday, Miss Corban, daughter of Corban, Isaacs & Co., *elle chante à ravir*, such delightful comic songs.

She does not sing generally at large parties, but she could not refuse *me*, nobody does, so remember that, young ladies."

At this juncture the Baroness was interrupted by the rapid entrance of Lord Chester, who could not resist having a look at the owner of the grey horses; though Blanche had charged him not to be drawn into an acquaintance with "that overpowering woman" on any account.

"Now, Hopkinson, are you ready?" he said, with a sort of sweeping bow to the whole party. "I am sorry to hurry you, but we must be off; and I had hardly time to run in, but my Lady charged me to say, Mrs. Hopkinson, that she cannot accept your excuse, and has thrown your note into the fire, and we expect you *all*—mind what I say—*all*, at half past seven, so, no more nonsense about it."

"Well, my Lord, you *may* expect, but you will not get *me* to come to one of your grand late dinners; they are quite out of

my way, and I should be quite in your way ; John and the girls may go, if they like."

"They have no option about it, and you had better not oblige me to come with two policemen and march you in to dinner too, I am quite capable of it. Now, John," and he hurried him off.

"Well, if ever there was a ridiculous, nonsensical dear boy, there he goes," said Mrs. Hopkinson, in a pleased soliloquy.

"Lord Chester, I believe?" said the Baroness, in a most subdued tone, "not ill-looking by any means. Adieu, my dear Mrs. Hopkinson, *nous nous reverrons* on the 23rd."

"Good bye," said Rachel, who lingered for a moment behind, "I see you do not mean to come, and you are right; but may I come again to see your daughters?"

"Of course, my dear, whenever you like."

"And—and—can you tell Captain Hopkinson—"

"Rachel, your aunt is waiting," said the Baron, from the bottom of the stairs.

"Tell him," she added hurriedly, "not

to begin mixing himself up with railroads and shares; ask him to consult Mr. Willis first," and she ran down.

"Well now, what with the aunt's French, and the niece's English, I am fairly puzzled!" said Mrs. Hopkinson, throwing herself back with a sigh of relief, "I daresay they are very nice people, but I should not very much care if I were never to see any of them again."

"And what is your opinion of the Baron now?" said Lord Chester as he drove off with Captain Hopkinson.

"A sharp fellow, and he seems to know what he is about, which is more than I do; for I never could catch his eye, and I never feel sure of a man who will not look me in the face."

"Rachel," said the Baroness, who seemed slightly out of sorts, "I do wish you would not keep me waiting an hour while you are dawdling through your civilities to those people. Their heads will be quite turned. As for that coxcomb, Lord Chester, I can't

think what he means, I suppose he was making a jest of the old lady."

"Perhaps," said the Baron, "he is in love with one of the young ones."

"Don't talk nonsense, my love," said the Baroness, sharply, "I never saw two more uninteresting girls—no manner, no *usage du monde*. What could you find to say to them, Rachel? I am sure you have seen nothing like them in my set."

"Nothing whatever that bears the slightest resemblance to them, Aunt."

"I thought so; and what did you make of the Captain, Baron?"

A shrug of the shoulders was the Baron's reply; but then, in his character of benevolent man, he added, "an honest, frank sailor, and it is not his fault if he does not spoil the view at Pleasance by setting the Thames on fire. I suspect he is well off, the fellow has such independant 'manners.'"

CHAPTER XVII.

WHEN Captain Hopkinson returned late from town, he found an argument raging between his wife and daughters—she declining to go to the dinner at Pleasance, and they declaring they would not go without her.

“I am glad you are come, papa,” said Janet, “here is mamma setting up a will of her own, and talking such nonsense that if it were Charlie she would be ashamed of him. Will you be so good as to speak to her?”

“She is really getting beyond our management,” added Rose, “and does not mind us even when we speak peremptorily to her.”

“My dears,” said Mrs. Hopkinson, her face radiant with delight, “you make me

angry, you really are very disrespectful, and your papa will be quite displeased. It is all about this dinner at Pleasance, John. The girls want me to go, and I mean to stay at home, and so we are playing a game at cross purposes."

"Then the girls have certainly won," said John, "for you are certainly going, I promised Arthur that I would bring you."

"Oh, John! how could you? I can't dine out, I'm so fat."

"Well, my dear, you can hardly expect to be as slim as you were at seventeen, but you are not half the size of your friend the Baroness; and this one dinner, unless you eat very voraciously, will not make you much fatter."

This idea threw Mrs. Hopkinson into one of her most comfortable fits of laughter. "You know that is not what I mean—but there is the butler, and all those footmen, they put me out; and they will snatch away my plate before I have finished; and there will be strangers who will be sure to wonder

where Lord and Lady Chester picked up such a vulgar old woman ; and then my face will become quite red. Why, goodness me ! It is very silly ; but I do believe I am shy like a young girl, so I had rather stay at home."

"But you will go to oblige me," said John, taking her hand kindly. "Lord and Lady Chester quite overrate the care I took of him in his illness ; to be sure I never saw any one recover from such an attack, but that was owing to his high spirits. However, they fancy I helped, and they seem to take pleasure in shewing us attention, so don't let us thwart them. They have made the party on purpose—just a very few friends whom you know—Lady Sarah Mortimer."

"Well, I do not mind her—such a nice old lady—always netting and talking sense."

"Colonel Hilton."

"To be sure, I ought not to mind him, because he never takes his eyes off Miss Grenville."

"Sir William and Lady Eleanor de Vescie."

“ Oh, my dear, I never saw them, I really can't go ; and indeed, I don't think the blonde on my cap is quite fresh.”

“ They are only Lord Chester's brother and sister, mamma, so they cannot be called company ; and Rose and I have made your cap a perfect model of fashion,” said Janet.

“ Then you will like to meet Greydon ; and there is nobody else but young Grenville and one or two of his friends ?”

“ Yes, young officers, full of jokes and quizzing. However, I don't mind being laughed at by them.”

“ Lord Chester did hint that perhaps his father might come,” added John falteringly. “ Lord Chesterton was so good as to say he wished to see me ; but you would not mind him, my dear.”

“ Lord Chesterton of all people—a Cabinet Minister, and I, who cannot read the ‘ Times,’ and should not know a Reform Bill from a Budget, if you were to pay me for it ; and I don't even know if I have a new pair of gloves in the house. Oh, John, John, this all comes of

your letting the 'Alert' catch a fever on board. Girls, what is to be done about my gloves?"

"There is a new pair all ready trimmed, mamma, and your grey brocade looks so imposing, so come and be dressed like a darling as you are."

"And will this be of any use?" said John, producing, according to custom, an attractive looking parcel, which proved to be a splendid lace mantilla. "There was a Mrs. Barlow on board who thought of nothing but finery. I believe if the ship had been going down, she would have stepped into her cabin to put on a becoming drowning dress. When we put in at Funchal she was wild to have this thing, and as her husband would not let her, I secured it for you, and she went into hysterics."

"Poor woman!" said Mrs. Hopkinson, "there is nothing like a glass of cold water for hysterics; but to be sure, such lace as this is not often to be seen, I own I do love a bit of good lace."

"And these mantillas are all the fashion. It is just what we wanted for her, thank you,

papa ; this is the best venture you have ever made.”

“ Ah, they don't know yet about the Cashmire shawls ; won't they be delighted ?” thought Captain Hopkinson, as the girls carried their mother off to her toilette.

The result was most successful ; the lace mantilla was, as Mrs. Hopkinson said, such a lady-like disguise, that she made her entry at Pleasance without becoming unusually red in the face, and the quiet kindness with which she was greeted, and the unaffected gaiety of her hosts, put her quite at ease. Seated at dinner next to Lord Chester, who exerted himself to amuse her, Baxter and the footman lost their terrors, and her delight was great when Dr. Ayscough glided into the chair at her side. “ I really think it is high time John should begin to be jealous of that man,” she told her daughters afterwards. “ Of course I did not mention Charlie, it would have been presuming ; but he began talking of him directly, and when I said how wonderfully the child had improved, he said I should live

to see him as fine a looking man as his grandfather ; not that John is his grandfather, but he is a fine looking man all the same. And it seems there is such a grand murder in the paper, you must find it and read it to me, girls ; a whole family poisoned by the father, just think of John poisoning us at breakfast, or indeed of his meddling with my tea-pot ; and Lord Chester and Dr. Ayscough said such clever things about poisons, I thought I would remember them for fear of accidents ; but I am not quite certain whether I have not forgotten part. However, I know it is not wholesome to take strichnine in any great quantity, so mind that, girls ; arsenic, which is very apt to get into puddings and gruel, should be avoided, and you should take something after it, if you do swallow any—but I forget what. It was really very interesting, and I like a good murder that can't be found out ; that is, of course, it is very shocking, but I like to hear about it. Then I thought I would take a hint about diet, by watching what the Doctor ate. You know he told us,

about Charlie, that all young meat, and pork, and raw vegetables, and sweet things, and pastry were bad ; and, my dear, he dined on veal cutlets and roast pork, salad, and jam tarts, and plum-pudding. I suppose doctors cure themselves when they get home after they have dined out, and I am so partial to him that he should have been welcome to my veal cutlet, though it was deliciously tender, and I also think we might manage that tomato sauce at home, it sets off veal. They talked a great deal too about Berlin, and the palace our Princess is to have ; altogether I was very much pleased, though I had a sad fright about my mantilla, when a great gold tag that footman had hanging from his shoulder—I wonder why—caught in it, but there was no harm done.”

The dinner gave general satisfaction. Blanche who was seated between Lord Chesterton and Captain Hopkinson, was gratified to see how well they amalgamated ; how Lord Chesterton began by formal, though genuine expressions of gratitude for the kindness

shewn to his son, and how this gradually expanded into curiosity as to the details of the late events in the East, and how he was evidently struck by the accuracy and observation which characterised Captain Hopkinson's remarks. Janet had contrived to sit next to her father, and as Mr Greydon had taken her in to dinner, he too joined in the conversation at that end of the table ; Janet's unaffected manner, her attention to her father, the intelligence with which she listened to what was passing, struck him, and for the first time it occurred to him that she was different from most of the young ladies he met at Dulham. He found himself watching for her opinions, entering into her jests with her father ; trying to catch her eye when any amusing anecdote was related, and when the ladies rose to retire, the look with which he returned to her her gloves and handkerchief, for which he had had of course to dive under the table, was a look of much meaning, one to be remembered for life. The great parasol day sank into insignificance.

Of course, before the first course was over, Blanche had composed a three volume novel of which Greydon was the hero, and Janet the heroine. Pleasance was to be the scene at which interesting meetings were to take place; she was to be the confidante of both parties, a living was to be found which should have every possible recommendation of situation, tithes, parsonage, &c., and finally a model clergyman was to be made happy with a model clergywoman. "Even Aunt Sarah herself must own that it requires no imagination to foresee all this," she thought, as she followed her guests out of the drawing-room; and as she passed her hand through Janet's arm, the warm pressure with which it was met, indicated a flow of happiness which could only expend itself in affection.

"Now, Mrs. Hopkinson, come and sit by me," said Blanche, when Aunt Sarah had settled her on the sofa. "I don't at all approve of the way in which you go on coquetting with Lord Chester; it is not correct, and it affects my domestic happiness, and

you are dressed for conquest. In my life I never saw such beautiful lace, what is it—Spanish?”

“I’m sure I don’t know,” said Mrs. Hopkinson, as soon as she could recover from the risible notion of her own coquetry. “It came from Funchal, though where that is I can’t say; John gave it to me just before I came out.”

“There never was such a John! and he is so agreeable too. I cannot think how you have the heart to go about flirting with other people’s Arthurs, when you have such a John of your own. Aunt Sarah, I have been so interested at dinner, it is really refreshing to hear conversation about facts, not about people. Captain Hopkinson told us such curious stories about China, and the nuns at Manilla, and their beautiful work; and a great deal about opium and cotton that was too learned for me, but Lord Chesterton was so much interested in that, and in tariffs and custom duties, that I could not give the conversation a frivolous turn; and besides, I

always feel elevated when the conversation of my neighbour at dinner is above my comprehension I always suppose they think me well informed, and I did pick up a great deal of information to-day. Now, tell me, Aunt Sarah, what you have heard."

"Not much, my dear, Mr. Greydon's attention was taken up by the same conversation that you found so interesting."

"Not exactly," said Blanche, smiling.

"And Sir William, who was my other neighbour, was rather annoyed because he has received two letters to-day, one without any postage stamp, and the other with a stamp that did not cover the weight, so he had to pay fourpence for the carelessness of other people."

"Poor man," said Blanche, looking round to ascertain that Lady Eleanor was not within hearing; "that is a serious loss, his limited means considered; he will be obliged to cut down timber, or mortgage the Hall if this sort of pillage goes on. Aunt Sarah, are you laughing?"

“No, my dear, I am netting, the purse is for Sir William ; he asked me to net one for him, he is so careless about his money. He says he lost a shilling yesterday when he took some silver out of his waistcoat pocket to pay the omnibus fare, so I promised him a purse.”

“And let us all subscribe and make up the shilling and fourpence he has lost, and you can present them to him in the purse ; will you, Aunt Sarah ?”

“If you continue to wish it, my dear, when my purse is finished.”

“I am sure Sir William deserves it,” said Mrs. Hopkinson, “I see he has sent £1000 to that Refuge which was on the point of being closed for want of funds.”

“There,” cried Blanche, “now that is always happening to me ; I never take up a judgment against any one for a small fault, that he does not come out with some overpowering merit that I had never foreseen. Aunt Sarah, I withdraw my offer of the one and fourpence, and I allow that I was mistaken in thinking Sir William fond of money.”

“ You will make a great many mistakes yet, dear child, I hope; for I do not want you to know the world well at eighteen. And I allow you to wonder, as I do, even at my age, why very wealthy men make many others happy by acts of great liberality, and make themselves uncomfortable by small meannesses; but so it is, and we must make the best of it. This orange silk is not a good match, is it?”

Blanche contrived to elicit some Sampson anecdotes from her friends, confirming her in her dislike of the supercilious Baroness, and the very different versions of Rachel given by Mrs. Hopkinson and her daughters interested her.

The girls were full of pity and admiration, and affirmed that when their mother understood Rachel a little better, she would like her. “ My dears, I had much better like her at once, if you wish it; for if I wait till I understand her, I shall just be uncharitable for the rest of my days, I never know whether she is talking prose or poetry,

or sense or nonsense ; but as you say, she is very much to be pitied, I pity her with all my heart. But when she comes to call upon you, I think she had better be shown up to your own room at once."

There was music, of course, in the evening. A duet by Rose and Harcourt that was effective in more ways than one ; she accompanied him quite to his satisfaction, and on that point he was hard to please ; their voices went well together, and when he suggested what he termed a different interpretation of three or four bars, she was so compliant, that though temper was with him quite a secondary consideration to voice, he thought that it would be very agreeable if Mrs. Harcourt, whoever she might eventually be, had Rose's good humour as well as her fine contralto voice.

"Is not that the young fellow we saw trying to drown himself the other day?" said Captain Hopkinson to Lord Chester, "and yet in a room he does not look like a fool, and he sings well. That duet was not amiss,

though I say it that should not. The girls have improved in their singing."

"I hope they will not improve any more," said Blanche, "it is perfect as it is, in that simple touching style."

Captain Hopkinson tried to say something disparaging of his daughters' performances, but failed completely. He was rather absorbed in watching Mr. Harcourt's manner to Rose, he did not like to own it to himself, but the young gentleman of the out-rigger seemed more devoted to his daughter than was pleasant. Captain Hopkinson had no wish to have his family circle broken up, just as he had come home to enjoy himself, and, moreover, he distrusted an individual who owned such an absurd boat. He did not observe another adversary; Mr. Greydon had come to that stage of admiration, in which he fancied that everybody was watching him, that if he spoke to Janet, all the bystanders would believe he was in love, which really would be too ridiculous; she was pretty, certainly, and an excellent girl, most useful

in the village, and there could be no doubt that she sung better than her sister—but the idea of his falling in love! Too absurd! and so instead of walking boldly up to the singers with the other gentlemen, he coasted round the room, took a survey of the pictures on the wall, and the books on the table, and so finally landed at the pianoforte, having, as he hoped, proved to himself and the bystanders that it was the last place in the apartment which presented any attraction to him.

Poor Greydon! when he went home that evening to his small room over the grocer's shop, where the one-eyed awkward shop-girl had forgotten to place his candles, and had carefully closed his windows to ensure a due amount of fustiness; where the furniture looked dusty, and where everything proclaimed "cheap lodgings for a single man without encumbrances," he sat down in a disconsolaté state of mind. He longed for "encumbrances," he despised single men and cheap lodgings, he wished for a living; and

above all, he determined to go himself the following morning with a book that he had promised to lend Captain Hopkinson. He really rather liked that family, and he could imagine that girls brought up as they had been, might make excellent wives to men who could afford to marry. He should not be surprised if Harcourt married one and Grenville the other.

The next morning he sallied forth with a very tiresome book on storms and currents in his pocket, and though Captain Hopkinson could not remember having expressed any wish to borrow it, he believed Mr. Greydon's assertion that he had—received him cordially, asked him to stay to luncheon, and after a visit that lasted two hours, the single man walked home to the cheap lodgings, not so certain as he had been that Janet should marry Grenville, Harcourt was quite welcome to Rose. He fairly owned to himself that he was in love, and being of a hopeful turn of mind, began to think that somebody—he did not know who—might, some day—he

did not know when—give him a living, he did not know where, and that Janet should habitually wear a blue muslin like that she had worn to-day. And just as this blissful vision was complete, the one-eyed maid knocked at the door with, “Please, Sir, missus sends the weekly bills.” If he had had Rachel’s turn for quotation, he could not have helped saying :

“ He thought of her afar, his own fair bride,
He turned and saw Gulnare the homicide.”

He had always disliked this particular Gulnare, who passed in ordinary life by the appellation of Keziah Briggs ; but to-day she was unusually homicidal. And then those red books, with the odour of fat meat, stale fish and rancid butter, that always steams up from them, he looked over them in despair. Janet, of course, would not eat much, but even an extra mutton chop, and French roll, and pat of butter would tell on the daily expenses ; and besides, she was used to every comfort at home. The

luncheon at the cottage was a feast compared to his ordinary dinner. He put aside the red books and took up the 'Times,' with a vague hope, of finding a very unusual advertisement of wanted, A Vicar for a good living &c., but found nothing more than a request from a poor curate with nine children, for cast-off clothes and postage stamps. The notion of marrying Janet on a settlement of twelve stamps, and the reversion for himself of another man's coat and waistcoat! and could it be expected that those whom Providence had blest with the extreme of affluence, should send Janet, in her utmost need, a light blue muslin with three flounces made in the last fashion? No, it would be madness to think of her, and that being established as a fact, he thought of nothing else during the hours—they were but few—in which he was not occupied in the high duties of his calling.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LADY CHESTER, too, had her thoughts on the subject. When the dinner party had dispersed, Lord Chesterton graciously signified his approval of her guests, which was a relief to her, as she had rather dreaded that the want of refinement or rather of vapidty, which was a safe quality in the society he ordinarily frequented, might have jarred him. But no! he thought Captain Hopkinson a well-informed agreeable man, the daughters pretty, and the wife a worthy woman in her way; and Mr. Greydon struck him as particularly gentleman-like. Was he a good clergyman?

“One of the best I have ever met with,” said Blanche, eagerly, “quite indefatigable in the schools and the hospital and the

workhouse, and you should come here some Sunday to hear him preach, I really think that the advantage of hearing Mr. Greydon's sermons should have been considered in the rent of Pleasance."

"Is he the rector of Dulham?"

"No, only the curate; the rector has gone abroad for his health."

"Greydon always was a good fellow," said Arthur, "but just the sort of man who will be a poor curate all his life, and be satisfied. He will never push himself into a living."

"But I do not mean him to be always a poor curate," said Blanche. "Lord Chesterton, you always carry about in your pockets all sorts of interesting letters, and useful information. Are you quite sure you have not got a good living in that left hand waistcoat pocket or an advowson? whatever that may be. It sounds like something very advantageous and nice. You always give your little Blanche everything she asks for. Please give me an advowson if you have one about you."

Lord Chesterton thought it right to explain to her in the most technical language, the difference between advowsons and presentations, and threw in a little good advice on the advantage it would be to Blanche if she studied greater correctness of expression, and if she always used precisely the right word, and the right number of words, and arranged those words grammatically. And Blanche thanked him so good-humouredly, and laughed at herself so heartily, that when she wound up her apologies by saying, "To speak tersely, I want a good living for Mr. Greydon, will you give me one?" he was induced to say, "Well, I will see what can be done for you." And, as Blanche afterwards observed to Arthur, she looked upon those few words as equal to an advowson and nearly as good as a presentation.

And so the evening ended happily; but the night that followed was not so peaceful. At five in the morning the Hopkinsons were awakened by a loud peal from their door bell.

“Ah, there they are,” said Mrs. Hopkinson, jumping up in a fright. “Oh John, what shall we do? I knew they would come to us in our turn.”

“Who would come, Jane?” said Captain Hopkinson, who was half asleep.

“Why, the burglars, of course! What will become of us! Where’s my purse? I always keep a purse ready to give them, it makes them so good-humoured. Oh dear, what a noise they make, and they will be quite savage if they are kept waiting,” she said, as another violent ringing was heard. “John, John, you must not go down to them, they will knock you down. Let me go.”

“I don’t see,” said John, laughing, “why I am to let you go and be knocked down instead of me; but, my dear, there is no danger, burglars do not come and ring the bell and ask to be let in like morning visitors. It must be the policeman.”

“Ah, poor man! I daresay, with his head knocked to pieces with a life preserver, and all over kicks and bites. But, perhaps, he

is only come to tell us that the house is on fire," said Mrs. Hopkinson, with a sudden accession of cheerfulness. "I should not mind that, anything is better than robbers. Oh, John, now don't put your head out so far, those ticket-of-leave men fire in all directions. And do keep calling out, Thomas and John, and I will answer with a gruff voice," said poor Mrs. Hopkinson, who was so terrified her whisper could scarcely be heard.

"My dear," said John, withdrawing his head, "there is nothing to be alarmed at, it is Lord Chester; Lady Chester is taken ill, and he wants you to go to her."

"And so that is all," said Mrs. Hopkinson, instantly beginning to dress. "Ah, poor soul! of course I will. Well now, this *is* neighbourly of them; and I take it very kindly their sending for me. Why, they are two babies themselves, and they can't know what to do with a third."

And so when Lord Chester met her with the humblest apologies, he found her in a warm fit of gratitude for having been called

out of her bed and frightened out of her senses, and delighted to find that her experience as a mother and a nurse were to be made available to her neighbours at a most inconvenient hour.

Pleasance did not wear its usual cheerful aspect that morning; the drawing-room had that deplorable 'last night' look, belonging to rooms that have not received the morning attentions of the housemaid. The chairs looked as if they had been dancing all night, and had ruffled their chintz covers, the books seemed to have fallen off the table in their sleep, and the music appeared to have quarrelled with the Pianoforte in an attempt to place itself on the music stand. Only one shutter had been partially unclosed, and through the crack, there came that struggling ray that ought to be light, but looks very much like dust.

Aileen came the moment she heard of Mrs. Hopkinson's arrival, looking pale and frightened, and she immediately hurried her neighbour upstairs, explaining that Blanche had been taken ill sooner than they expected,

so that the nurse was not in the house. Arthur had sent for Dr. Ayscough, but in the meantime they had all become very nervous, and Blanche thought she should be happier if Mrs. Hopkinson was with her, and so they had taken the great liberty of asking her to come to them at that undue hour, &c., &c.

“My dear, don’t say another word about it; what are we all sent into the world for, but to be of use to each other? and I am quite pleased that your dear little sister, bless her, fancies having me with her; and now, Miss Grenville, don’t you go to her with that frightened face, there is nothing to be frightened about. There is no want of babies coming safely into the world, thank goodness, but go into her room with your usual smiles, and tell her I’m come; and I’ll just take off my bonnet, and then go and stay with her till the doctor comes.”

And very serviceable Mrs. Hopkinson was. She found Aileen still with tears in her eyes, Mademoiselle Justine occasionally proffering to Blanche a little *tisane de fleur d’orange*, and

watching an opportunity to slip out and dress herself in a *petite robe de percale*, and a *bonnet à barbes*, that she had prepared for the particular occasion ; and which were not only becoming in themselves, but so appropriate that even the Doctor and the nurse must, she thought, be struck by her wonderfully good taste in dress. Arthur was fidgetting up and down the room, one minute looking out of the window and wondering the doctor did not come—the next assuring Blanche that she was better, that she looked better, felt better, and requesting her to agree with him, a complete impossibility under the circumstances, so that poor Blanche became only more nervous. Mrs. Hopkinson wisely hurried them all out of the room, advised Justine to see that the basket with the doll's caps, and the absurd pin-cushion with its 'welcome little stranger' were all ready ; and told Arthur and Aileen to go and have some breakfast, and to send some to her ; and she gave an every day turn to the state of affairs that was soothing.

An hour after, Arthur came with a face of

consternation, Dr. Ayscough had been telegraphed off to the other side of England, and the nurse could not possibly leave the place she was in till the afternoon.

“What are we to do, Mrs. Hopkinson? it is really too bad; what business had that woman in Yorkshire to telegraph for our doctor? and then that other woman detaining Mrs. Smith—so selfish! and my poor darling will have no doctor and no nurse, she will die.”

“Oh no, she wont,” said Mrs. Hopkinson, half laughing, “unless you go and put it into her head to do so. I hope I am as good a month nurse as any in the kingdom; and you had better send for Mr. Duckett, of course he is not to be compared to Doctor Ayscough, but he is in good practice at Dulham, and we may as well have him in the house.”

Mr. Duckett had always felt that Lady Chester ought to be his property; he had occasionally attended at Pleasance, and during the last week his slumbers had been unusually light, and his attention

to the sound of the night bell was unremitting. He came instantly; Lady Sarah arrived from London; and finally, the important Mrs. Smith appeared in a hack cab, that was almost concealed under her mass of trunks and cap boxes. The Duchess of St. Maur came to pay an early visit connected with Aileen's trousseau, and of course remained to hear the end of Blanche's troubles. Everybody was more or less in a fuss; it was curious, considering that the birth of a baby is not a very unusual circumstance, to see the immense interest that the expectation of a young Chester created. Lady Sarah abandoned her netting; and she, and the Duchess, and Aileen whispered and cried, and talked and laughed, and drank tea and coffee at odd hours, and put on *peignoirs*, and did what Shakespeare calls 'the gossips' to perfection. Arthur walked up and down stairs unceasingly; the tread-mill would have been repose to him that day, and he tried to cut little failures of jokes to Duckett on the useless fidgets of the ladies, who were models of quiescence as compared

with himself. Duckett assumed a grand attitude of composure, repeated every half hour "we are going on admirably," and then tried to *égayer* Lord Chester by some horrible surgical anecdote, which, in the best of times would have made him shudder, and now that he was nervous and frightened, made him feel that he was actually undergoing the actual operation described. He was certain that nobody had ever had such a wife as his, and that no woman had ever endured so much with so much fortitude. He went from Lady Sarah to the Duchess to be soothed, and when their matronly experience failed to console him, he turned to Aileen, and as for the brusque word or two which Mrs. Hopkinson occasionally found time to bestow on him, he accepted it as an oracle from heaven.

At last, there came the joyful whisper, "a fine boy;" perhaps the only moment of a fine boy's existence in which his presence is more agreeable than his absence, so let him make the most of it. But if in the whole course of woman's sensitive life there is one moment of

happiness more keen, blissful, bright, than another, it is that in which the husband of her choice thanks her for his first born child. It was with heartfelt gratitude that Blanche whispered "I thank God, love, that he has not taken me from you," for she felt, as Arthur pressed her to his heart, as with tears he thanked her for being so patient, so good—as he blessed her, not so much that she was the mother of his child, as that she was still his own, his wife, his Blanche; yes, she felt that life was indeed to her most precious. "It would have been hard to die," she murmured, "I could not have left all these," and she kissed the hands of her aunt, her sister, and her friend; and quiet tears of gratitude fell as she listened to the short prayer of thanksgiving which Aileen read as she knelt at her sister's bedside.

But there the pathos of the scene ended, then the bustling Mrs. Smith assumed her rights. "Come, come, we must have no more of this reading and talking, and all this crying. Now, my Lord, if you'll just go

quite away I'll be particularly obliged to you; and I must make bold to turn all you ladies out of the room, except this good lady," she added, turning to Mrs. Hopkinson, whose *savoir faire* had inspired her with confidence, "and, Miss Grenville, will you please to see that there is no noise made up those stairs, and I'll just shut the door after you, my Lord, if you will go."

"I must go to my father, who is down stairs," said Arthur, "he is so delighted with his grandson, Blanche."

"Oh! may I not see him for a moment, before I settle for the night?" said Blanche.

"Oh dear no, my Lady, not upon no account," said Mrs. Smith, colouring up as if the mere suggestion were a personal affront. "As sure as I'm alive, not another word shall be spoken here this blessed night. Tell Lady Blanche's papa, my Lord, that her Ladyship wishes him good night, and is very sorry she is not able to see him. No, no grandpapas indeed," she muttered, as she bustled about the room, and established that

rustling disturbed sort of quiet, which is the peculiar result of a regular nurse's exertions, and which is—strange to say—less irritating to the nerves of an invalid than the finished quiet of a lady-like attendant.

Lord Chesterton was extremely pleased with the birth of his grandson, for Arthur was the only heir to his old title and large estates—two possessions which he valued almost equally. He was informed of it at the House of Lords, and actually left that lively assembly in order to drive down to Pleasance, before the important debate on the Trawl and Seine Herring fishing nets was brought to a close, a direliction of public duty which weighed on his conscience; but he tried to atone for it by filling his carriage with red boxes containing minutes about Hospodars, and statements of the wrongs of Dedarkham Bux in the well known cause of the Jaghire of Munnydumdum. Public men keep up to this day the farce of saying that they read these papers. However, the absorbing interest they possessed, did not prevent Lord Chesterton from entering

heartily into the private rejoicings at Pleasance.

“I wish you had seen my father,” Arthur afterwards said to Blanche; “he thought it right to see the baby, because he looks upon that mite as a young earl, and a sucking Secretary of State, but he was afraid of touching it, and contented himself with stroking it with the end of his gold pencil case, and assuring Mrs. Smith that it was a remarkably fine child, and that he hoped she would take the greatest care of it, as its life was of immense importance. And to judge by the number and depth of Mrs. Smith’s curtesies, he must have enforced this recommendation by lucrative arguments.”

“Was baby good?” asked Blanche, with as much earnestness as if it had passed its six hours of life in deep study of the whole duty of man.

“Well, it gave a curious twitch of its chin, not very becoming, but my father took it for a laugh. Blanche, he told me to tell you he thought he should have some good

news for you by the time you were able to see him."

"Oh, Arthur, a living for Mr. Greydon! and then suppose he does not propose to Janet after all. That would be distressing!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THERE seemed, however, no threatening of this danger for the present. Mr. Greydon had, till lately, so sedulously repressed any notion of falling in love, or of the possibility of marrying, that now he had once admitted the idea, he acted upon it with his usual energy. He said it was singular how often he met Captain Hopkinson and his daughters out walking—there must be a fatality about it—the fatality being, that he looked out of his window, which commanded a partial view of their house, till they came out, and then, by walking very fast, he either overtook them or met them; and in either case, by another strange fatality, he happened to have some parish work to do, precisely

in the direction in which they were going. Then he professed to feel so much interest in Lady Chester and her baby, that it could only be satisfied by authentic accounts from Mrs. Hopkinson, who was constantly at Pleasance; and if she happened to be there when he called, Captain Hopkinson received him and took him up to the drawing-room, and then there was a school talk, and perhaps a little music; and altogether, if Mr. Greydon's income had increased at all in proportion to his passion, there would have been a Mrs. Greydon in a very few weeks. Captain Hopkinson saw how matters stood, and abstained from interference. He supposed if the young people liked each other, they would make it out somehow, when Jane and he married they had not more than a hundred a year, and now they had more money than they could spend. Mr. Greydon might ask him for his daughter, and would, perhaps, be surprised to find that little Janet would bring her fair share towards the expenses of a family, and in the meanwhile

they were welcome to see as much of each other as they liked.

Willis, in former days, would not have observed whether anybody spoke to his sisters-in-law or not ; but some change had come over the spirit of his very melancholy dream. He looked more at what was passing around him, and less at his own petty grievances. It generally appeared that he had been dining with the Sampsons, or calling on them ; and he talked of the necessity of giving a great *fête* at Columbia Lodge, to return the civilities that had been shown to him ; and, to the unutterable surprise of Janet and Rose, announced that he had had the pianoforte tuned, on which poor Mary had been used to play some little tunes that sounded like the wailings of a moulting linnet. "And if you will bring your music, girls, it will be a great treat for—" and then he added in one of his old querulous tones, "for the Baroness."

The girls were much flattered that Charles should think their singing a treat for anybody,

and acute enough to guess what the pause in his sentence meant ; and when Miss Monteneros was announced soon after, the something almost amounting to animation in Willis's manner confirmed their suspicions. Rachel had called on them frequently lately ; sometimes with gifts for poor people, a list of whom she had obtained from Janet—sometimes in a moody humour, which she assured them could only be dispelled by talking it off to them—sometimes full of dry fun, and seeming to take life as a farce ; but whatever was the vein of the day, little Charlie was the “ master of the situation.”

The child had taken a fancy to her the first time he saw her, and Rachel had had so little experience of affection, that his artless fondness touched her to the heart ; she loved him with a passionate love, she made herself his willing slave, told him odd amusing stories, and then again talked to him in sober earnest, as if he and she understood the world and each other better than any other two people on earth. There is nothing so attractive to

a child, particularly to a sick child, as being treated like a very old man, Charlie would sit on Rachel's knee, his eyes fixed admiringly on her, while she "fabled of green fields," or turned the white feathery clouds on the bright blue canopy above, into troops of angels, to whose swift flight she gave fanciful destinations; and Charlie would gravely say, "Yes, veddy true, pooty Rachel," and shake his head with an air of precocious wisdom that delighted her.

"Nay, never shake your gory locks at me, such dear little curling locks, too, as they are. And now, Charlie, your aunts have got some more visitors to entertain," she whispered, as Mr. Greydon was announced, "so you and I will go and sit in the shade in gradmamma's garden, and I will tell you such a funny story of a little kitten," and with a nod to the girls, she carried him off. Willis looked fidgetty, and did not lend himself to conversation with his usual asperity, and after a time he too disappeared in the direction of the garden.

There he found Charlie in fits of laughter at the extraordinary sayings and doings of the supposititious kitten.

“You will spoil my poor little man, Miss Monteneros,” looking at Charlie with an ominous shake of the head.

“Oh! nebber shake your golly locks at me,” said the child.

“Now, was there ever such a darling?” said Rachel, “and I only said that once to him. He is too clever!”

“Ah, yes, poor little fellow,” said Willis, with another shake of his ‘golly locks,’ meant to imply the probable fate of such early precocity.

“Charlie pet, go and pick me a quantity of daisies and I will make such a necklace for you. I sent him away, Mr. Willis, because I want to beg you not to speak so discouragingly of his health when he is present. He is old enough, or, at least, quick enough to understand, in some degree, your forebodings. I know,” she added, in her most gracious manner, “that I am taking a very

great liberty in saying this; but you are very fond of your little boy, and I am sure you will forgive me."

"More than that," said Mr. Willis, looking extremely complacent, "I feel very much obliged to you, I know I ought to conceal my habitual melancholy from the observation of that babe."

"Certainly," said Rachel, "and from everybody else. There is no great merit in bearing grief grievously, and there is certainly no great charm in habitual melancholy, be it real or artificial."

"I hope, Miss Monteneros, you do not suspect me of being artificial."

"Are not you? Well, I do not know, I am very artificial myself, a regular actress, but I have always thought you outdid me in that line. Why now, Mr. Willis, Hamlet, you know, says that,

" 'The inky cloke

The windy inspirations of forced breath,

And the dejected 'haviour of the visage,'

are actions that a man may *seem*, they do

not 'denote him *truly*.' Now, what good reason have you for all this shew of distress?"

Willis was posed. He could hardly allege to Rachel, with whom he was really in love, that he was still inconsolable for the loss of a wife, for whom he had cared little while she was alive, and when he came to think what other griefs he had, he somehow could not recollect them at the moment; so he murmured something about a solitary home and Charlie's health, a great bereavement and a natural proneness to foresee the worst, &c.

"That is a misfortune, certainly," said Rachel, "many people would call it a fault. But dear little Charlie's health is improving daily, so *there* is one ray of happiness. With that kind cheerful set of people we have just left, who treat you like a son and brother, you can always find a home that is *not* solitary. As for your great bereavement, for which I heartily pity you, time must have done something for you, and as for the constant reference you constantly make

to it, I long to say to you—but no, I have no right to speak. Ah,” she added, trying to relapse into her usual careless manner, “of all people in the world, I am about the last fitted to give good advice.”

“No, you are not,” said Willis, with more eagerness than he often evinced. “What is it you long to say?”

“Why, just what the Quaker said to the Duchess of Buckingham, when he found her, two years after her husband’s death, in a darkened room, hung with black, ‘What, friend, hast thou not forgiven God Almighty yet?’ And now I really must go to Charlie and his daisies,” said Rachel, rising hastily and escaping, for she was half frightened at her own daring.

But thither Willis followed, staggered by her last stroke of wisdom, and slightly ashamed of her insight into his character, but flattered to the last degree by the interest she appeared to take in his happiness, and not at all aware that Charlie was at the bottom of all this plot against his querulousness.

Rachel did not choose that Charlie should sit under the shadow of Willis' withered gourd, and she did not think that the gourd had any right to wither with such a Charlie to shine on it.

"Miss Monteneros," he began, "I hope you will allow me to thank you for the advice you have given me, and I beg to assure you—"

"Oh!" said Rachel, "if I have not affronted you, I am more than satisfied; and now for my daisy-chain. Papa must not interrupt us, must he, Charlie? we are decided on that point."

"Twite detided," said Charlie with great energy, "papa, please go."

"Are you not going to do what Charlie tells you?" said Rachel, smiling, finding after a time that Willis was still standing by them.

"I am not going," he said, rather moodily. "Miss Monteneros," he added after a pause, "you seem to take great interest in my little boy."

“The greatest possible, Charlie and I are intimate friends.”

“Dat we are,” said Charlie, “oh, veddy imitate.”

“Cannot you extend that friendship to his father?”

“I am not much given to friendship,” she said carelessly, and more occupied in tying her daisy bracelets round Charlie’s wrists, than in his father’s remarks. “But if I had been your friend for the last twenty years, I could not have told you more crude, disagreeable truths than I did to-day. I can tell you as many again,” she added, laughing, “if that proof of friendship will satisfy you.”

“No, it will not,” he said with some spirit; “I ask for more, the truths you have spoken were not disagreeable, because they came from you, and I hope you will see they have not been spoken in vain. When you tell me to be more cheerful, when you say my home might be happy, Miss Monteneros, it is in your power to verify your own prophecy.”

Rachel looked up with an air of intense astonishment.

“You are fond of that child, oh! Miss Monteneros, let him find in you the mother he has lost. It is in your power to make both the child and father happy.”

“Oh, Mr. Willis, what are you saying? Stay one moment—” Then there was a pause, and to Willis’ extreme surprise, she burst into a hearty laugh.

“I beg your pardon,” she said, “but to think of all my exhortations to you to be happy, ending in your asking me to be your wife. Why, of all the methods of being miserable, which you are so fond of trying, you could not have invented one so certain to produce the desired unhappy result as that. I suppose there are not two people in England who would suit each other so little as we should. We do not care about each other, to begin with; and there are you, still in the deepest mourning, and avowedly inconsolable for the loss of your first wife, asking a woman every way dissimilar to her, to be your second.”

“But Mary did not suit me,” faltered the unhappy Willis, “I could not love her ; she was amiable certainly, but quite without the charm, the power that you have, Miss Monteneros. You would give an interest to my home that it has never had, and the gloom—”

“Say no more, Mr. Willis,” said Rachel gravely ; “you can hardly expect that I should have accepted your proposal under any circumstances, and we know each other so little, that my refusal can give you but little pain. But think of the avowal you are now making ; you have sought sympathy far and wide, and paraded sorrow in all directions, and yet you tell me that the Mary whose loss has been bewailed with such ostentation, ‘did not suit you,’ you could not love her. Oh ! where is Truth ? am I never to find it ? I can bear artifice in the frivolities and gauds of the world, it is all artificial in itself, all heartless—but sorrow should be as true as it is sacred. Falseness there, appals and disgusts me.”

She was trembling with excitement, but she

took up Charlie as she spoke, and perhaps the sight of his wistful eyes, and the touch of his tiny hands softened her, for she turned back and added: "Perhaps I have spoken too harshly, but the dead should never be named slightingly; she was Charlie's mother, too, do not say you never loved her."

And so she departed, leaving Willis more ashamed, more lowered in his own conceit than he could have supposed possible, and yet with a perception of the greatness and nobleness of truth, that gave him an elevation of feeling he had hitherto never known.

Rachel deposited Charlie with his aunts, and walked home half annoyed, half amused with what had passed. "That comes of giving advice," she thought. "It never answers, but I did it for Charlie's sake; and as the man has no real feeling, no great harm is done. I wish little Charlie had not been so funny and clever about the 'golly locks,' it made me long to be his mother; but to be sure it would not do to marry poor Mr. Willis on the strength of that one quotation."

CHAPTER XX.

Mrs. HOPKINSON was now released from her attendance on Blanche, to whom she had endeared herself by her unwearied kindness, and who looked up to her as a miracle of wisdom on the subject of babies in general, and this valuable baby in particular. As a proof that tact, which is only another name for consideration of the feelings of others, is compatible with unpolished manner, it may be mentioned that Mrs. Hopkinson and the nurse parted without having had one dissension; and even with an admission on the part of Mrs. Smith, "that that good lady knew very well what she was about, and that, considering how delicate Lady Chester was, and how little she knew about a nursery, it

was quite a mercy she had Mrs. Hopkinson to look after her."

Lord Chesterton had informed Blanche that, by a happy coincidence, the living of Chesford, their own parish, had become vacant, a very few days after she had intimated to him her wishes for Mr. Greydon ; and it was decided between them, that on the important occasion of Albert Victor Chester's christening, Blanche should have the pleasure of announcing to Mr. Greydon his preferment.

She had now re-established herself on her sofa in the garden, and the old Pleasance habits were resumed. Janet and Rose were often asked to sit with her. Mr. Harcourt and his outrigger were again skimming on the surface, and floating about Rose ; Mr. Greydon either had some excuse for calling on Arthur, or called without any excuse at all, except the old hacknied one of ' the fatality,' and by his manner to Janet, Blanche was led to the comfortable conviction, that by giving Mr. Greydon this living, she should at once provide her village with an unexceptionable

pastor, and pay off some of her debt of gratitude to the Hopkinson family.

The Sampsons continued to give their elaborate dinners, and their gorgeous déjeuners, and it almost appeared as if the Court Journal kept a special Sampson correspondent, so numerous were the paragraphs devoted to the sayings and doings, and givings and receivings of the Baroness. The Baron was more bland, more prosperous, and more superbly humble than ever; but it is to be hoped that the Baroness' guests derived more enjoyment from her hospitalities than she did, for she was constantly either irritable and dejected, or in a state of nervous high spirits, and she looked so ill, that Rachel suggested to her to have some medical advice.

"I cannot think what you mean," said her Aunt peevishly, "I am sure with all my parties and fêtes, and all the luxuries that surround me, it would be strange if I wanted to complain to a doctor; what do you suppose ails me, Rachel?"

“That is what I want to know, Aunt Rebecca, you do not look well, and perhaps Dr. Ayscough—”

“Oh, don’t talk to me of Dr. Ayscough, he really is too trying, never attaching the slightest importance to any of my symptoms, nor, in fact, to anything I say.”

“Well, Mr. Duckett is reckoned clever, and is close at hand, and he has been attending Lady Chester.”

“Oh, thank you, I am not going to trust my health to a country apothecary. It is all very well for the Chesters, who are, I suppose, as poor as rats while Lord Chester-ton lives. I think, with all our wealth, I might afford to see a physician.”

“Can I write to any one for you? those nervous headaches—”

“I really must beg, Rachel, you will not take these strange fancies. What can make me nervous? me, who am notorious for high spirits!” whereupon the Baroness burst into tears, and became almost hysterical.

Rachel quietly administered all the usual

remedies, and then in silence began arranging some flowers.

“Well,” said the Baroness, “I must say you take things coolly. Having brought on this attack ; you might as well send for assistance. I suppose you had better write and ask Dr. Ayscough to drive down here, for I must be quite myself on Wednesday. That will be the last and the best of our parties,” she said with a ghastly smile.

And so the physician was summoned, and was received by the Baroness, with all her accustomed graces, which, generally were completely thrown away upon him ; but to-day he seemed to study her looks with attention, and to bear her rambling statements with unusual patience.

“I really have nothing to tell you, my dear Sir, just a little headache—you know what a sensitive creature I am, and I think the wind is in the East. I always feel an East wind *jusqu'au bout des doigts*, and I have been overdoing my gaieties. I want rest, and change of air. The Baron is taking a

splendid moor. Would the Highlands suit me?"

"Is the Baron thinking of going soon?"

"Oh, almost immediately," she said with some hesitation. "He talks of making a run down to Scotland to see the place before he buys it, and I am almost afraid he will not be here to receive his friends next Wednesday—the 12th of August is near at hand."

"And so you are making preparations for a start, eh? And Baron Sampson will give his friends the slip on Wednesday," and Dr. Ayscough felt the pulse in his hand give a sudden bound. "Well, I do not see that the journey would do you any harm, and change of air and scene would do you good. You are nervous."

"No, I am not; I cannot think what possesses everybody to suspect me of nerves. What reason upon earth can I have for being nervous?"

"That you must tell me," he said, "I can only assert the fact; and I am not bound to furnish reasons for the illnesses of you London fine ladies."

The Baroness was so charmed at finding herself classed by this fashionable physician with the fine ladies of the day, that she rallied; and while Dr. Ayscough was writing her prescription, tried a little light talk on the subject of the Chesters—pitied them for the privations that the poverty, with which she chose to endow them, imposed upon them—she believed Lady Chester sent for the village apothecary when she was taken ill, and depended for a nurse on the good offices of a Mrs. Hopkins, or some name of that kind, a neighbour. “To be sure, young people are right not to run into debt; but I cannot fancy putting up with anything second rate myself, indeed the Baron would not hear it from me, he always says, ‘Nothing second rate for you, Baroness, whatever money can buy, you can have, only let it be the best.’”

“Well, if money can buy a Mrs. Hopkinson,” said Dr. Ayscough, drily, “it can do more than I have ever supposed. Mrs. Hopkinson has been a valuable friend to Lady Chester, who required constant and great

care for ten days ; and now there are those pleasing young girls to amuse her, and sing to her during her convalescence. They must be pleasant neighbours for you, Baroness."

"Oh dear ! I am much too insignificant a person for the Miss Hopkinsons to notice. Nothing but Duchesses and Viscountesses will satisfy them ! I would have brought them out at my *déjeuners*, out of mere good-nature. However, they are not worth talking of. Tell me some news, Dr. Ayscough, you always hear the last London reports."

"Unluckily, I have been out of town most part of the day, so I cannot give you any gossip. There are two more great failures in the city. I wonder where these smashes will end."

"Two more !" said the Baroness faintly, "do you recollect their names ? not that I should be much the wiser, if you told me," she added with a forced laugh. "The Baron happily is quite independant of all these speculators."

"Corban's house was one, I know."

The Baroness turned pale. "The other, I forget, but I heard it was connected with the Corbans."

"Ah, indeed! Well your time is so valuable, I must not detain you, in fact it was absurd to trouble you, I am so well." She sank back in her chair, almost fainting.

Dr. Ayscough waited a few minutes, and then said kindly. "You have something weighing on your mind." She shook her head, but her colour was livid, and the hand she held out to him trembled.

"Would it be a relief to you, to tell me what you apprehend? You cannot suppose that your confidence would be betrayed."

She looked fixedly at him, and the tears stood in her eyes; but suddenly she seemed by a strong effort to calm herself, and with a laugh that was more distressing than her tears, she said, "This is really too good, what apprehensions can I have? except perhaps that we may have rain on Wednesday, and that all my fireworks may fail. Good morning, I suppose it is impossible to prevail

on you, to honour our festivities with your presence.”

“Quite impossible,” he said. “Good morning.”

“I always thought that Baron a very plausible rascal,” was his reflection as he got into the carriage, “and now I am sure of it. He will be off before Wednesday, and she will brazen it out to the last.”

After the Doctor's departure, the Baroness told Rachel that he had quite laughed at the notion of her being nervous, and considered her perfectly capable of a journey to the Highlands, and that he had recommended to her to take her usual airing. So, as she should probably be off to Scotland in a few days, she thought of driving up to town, and depositing her diamonds and trinkets at the banking house; and at the same time she could give directions for packing up whatever she might want at Lochingar. “I am afraid the house is small for our establishment, and I almost doubt,

my dear Rachel, whether you will be lodged so well as we could wish."

"Thank you, Aunt Rebecca, do not trouble yourself about me; I have always intended to tell you that whenever you leave this villa, I mean, as shopkeepers say, to set up for myself. I am much obliged to you and to my Uncle for—" Rachel hesitated, she knew that the very large allowance made for her during her minority had more than saved her from any pecuniary obligation, and she had met with no affection. However, she added, "for the home you have given me, and now I must try what I can do for myself."

"And will such a very independant young lady condescend to impart her plans for the future? I should have thought I might have been consulted *si ce n'était que pour la forme,*" said the Baroness, who, however willing and anxious to get rid of a niece who was younger and handsomer than herself, and addicted to speaking plain truths, was yet piqued by the ease with which their acquaintance was dissolved.

“I am thinking of going to the sea-side in the first instance. My old governess will be glad to pass the holidays with me, and that little delicate boy of Mr. Willis’s is advised to try sea-bathing—so, if the Hopkinsons will let me have him, he will go too.”

“Upon my word, this is extremely flattering to the melancholy Jaques, as you chose to nickname my friend Mr. Willis. Well, nothing in this world surprises me; but I must say, that after being accustomed to the society of Moses, with his wit and vivacity and air of fashion,” (poor dear Moses, with his vulgar jokes, and flashy appearance) “I can hardly understand this preference of that gloomy man. Not that Moses is a marrying man. Don’t go and fancy that, and I am sure Willis is much too devoted to the memory of his first wife to think of a second, so you have no chance there.”

“How distressing!” said Rachel, “but it will be interesting to sit on the rock and pine for either or both of them.

“Suppose I stand upon the sea-beach now,
Mine arms thus, and mine hair blown with the wind,
Wild as the desert—and behind me—
Make all a desolation—See! see!

“Aunt Rebecca.

A miserable life of this poor picture.”

Rachel knew that a good strong quotation always drove the Baroness out of the field, and her vivid delineation of Aspasia's misery had the desired effect. The Baroness was mystified into silence, and left the room merely saying, “Well, Moses is not likely to trouble you, at all events.”

“No, I suppose not, after what I said to him last week,” said Rachel, who knew from her cousin, that his mother had urged him to weary her with constant proposals; and so they parted.

“Oh dear! how unamiable I am when I am with my uncle and aunt,” thought Rachel, “thoroughly detestable I may say, and yet when I am with those girls, or little Charlie, I can be as good as gold, and so tame that that baby can lead me; I do believe evil qualities are more catching than measles.”

CHAPTER XXI.

THE great event of the christening of Albert Victor took place the day before that fixed for Baroness Sampson's fête, and a large party was assembled at Pleasance. It had been very trying to Blanche to keep the secret of the living at Chesford so long from Mr. Greydon; but then, as she observed to Aunt Sarah, the course of his true love seemed to run all the more rapidly, because it was so far from being smooth. "I should like him to propose on his three hundred a-year, Aunt Sarah, it would be so romantic and touching."

"And so extraordinarily silly, my dear; that if he did, I should not think him fit to hold the living. Are you anxious he should

have it, Blanche, because he is a good clergyman, or because you think he is attached to Janet?"

"A little of both, Aunt Sarah; but please do not say because I *think* he is attached. There can be no doubt of the fact. Don't you see yourself that he is desperately in love?"

"My love, it is more than half a century ago since I had any experience in love making, and all its little signs and follies are not so visible through my spectacles as they are to your young eyes; but I daresay you are right and I hope you are, for Janet is a pleasing good young woman, and will make an excellent wife for a clergyman."

"Oh yes, she will be so useful at Chesford, and such a nice neighbour for me; and then if Rose marries Mr. Harcourt—"

"What! another love story? My dear Blanche, I hope you are not going to turn into a match-maker; of all the dangerous manufactories in the world, that is the worst, and the most unsatisfactory."

“Yes, if I sat down deliberately and said, there is the Reverend Horace Greydon, a friend of Arthur’s, an excellent young man, and there is Janet Hopkinson who would exactly suit him, I will try and make up a match between them; that would be wrong, and perhaps a year hence they would hate the sight of me for having thought of it. But when I see that they are mutually attached and longing to be married, then I step in like a beneficent fairy, and give them the means of meeting, and the means of living, and *my* manufactory, Aunt Sarah, only turns out the best finished articles of happiness. I *do* like to help young people in their love affairs,” said Blanche in a reflective staid tone, implying that her long life of eighteen years, and her twelvemonths of marriage had given her the experience and benevolence appropriate to a prosperous old age.

“But to return to Rose and Mr. Harcourt,” said Aunt Sarah, smiling.

“I do not take quite such a lively interest in their affairs, there are no difficulties to

overcome; and though Mr. Harcourt is a good-natured gentleman-like young man, he is not to be compared to Mr. Greydon, and, moreover, he seems to me to sing out of tune. Rose will pass a life of accompaniments; and she must be very much in love, to change the time and the key of 'Ah, si ben mio,' as she did last night, and yet to thank Mr. Harcourt for the signal failure he made of it at last."

"And what is to become of your friend Mrs. Hopkinson when you have married off both her daughters, and her husband is again gone to sea?"

"Ah, poor old dear! I have been fretting about her very much, and with all my imagination, Aunt Sarah, I have not yet imagined a fate that satisfies me for my darling old Hop. I should like her to be near baby, she understands him so thoroughly; and if she would take care of him, I could take care of her. It is a pity that Chesterton is not semi-detached, that she had part of it. A semi-detached castle would be a novelty."

“Blanche, do you remember the fat mother with black mittens, and the daughters with the pianoforte, and the startling boy, and the horrors of a semi-detached house?”

“Perfectly, Aunt Sarah, and you see I was right as to the facts, except that Charlie does not throw stones, but wrong as to the conclusions I drew from them. However, I could not foresee that I should be housed with such excellent people. What a number of small kindnesses those Hopkinsons have shewn me.”

“My dear child!” said Lady Sarah kissing her, “you are likely to meet with many kindnesses, small and great in your journey through life, if you keep up that warm interest in the happiness of others which you feel now. Like will to like, and so my Blanche will find warm friends wherever she goes: and now go and dress for your christening, I hope you have no more matches to make.”

“Not at this moment; but it strikes me, Aunt Sarah, that if the Duchess should have another little girl in a year or two, baby will

certainly fall in love with her twenty years hence—that will be very interesting.”

In the meantime, baby was christened, and immediately after their return home, Blanche drew Mr. Greydon aside, and said to him with tears in her eyes, “You have to-day been the instrument of conferring on my darling boy, the greatest gift God has given to man, pray for him that he may be a Christian indeed—such a Christian as you, Mr. Greydon, are in heart and life. At this moment all earthly gifts seem to me but trifles, but I have one to offer to you.”

“Oh, Lady Chester, do not speak of a gift to me. Do you suppose that the ceremony which has been performed to-day, has not been most deeply interesting to me, that it was not a boon to myself to be allowed to bear my part in it? I assure you, I care much for the child of my earliest friend.”

“I know you do, Mr. Greydon,” said Blanche, holding out her hand to him, “and I was expressing myself foolishly. In fact, it is another boon I am going to ask you to bestow

on us ; I want you to come and look after us all at Chesford. That living is now vacant, and Lord Chesterton has commissioned me to offer it to you."

"To me!" said Mr. Greydon, "oh, Lady Chester this is your doing. Chesford—where I shall be near you and Arthur, I cannot thank you, and at this moment too, you do not know—"

"Yes, I do," she said smiling, "at least I think I do, thanks to my own observation, not to any confidence that has been placed in me."

"What was there to confide?" he said eagerly, "but the utter hopelessness of an attachment which strengthened every hour, in proportion to that hopelessness. I had no prospect of preferment, no possibility of offering to her a home that was worthy of her ; but now—oh, Lady Chester, I cannot tell you how happy you have made me."

"And let us hope it will make her happy too. You have not named her, but I always

guess right, and I assure you that the idea of having her for my neighbour, makes me doubly happy ; and now go and say your say to Lord Chesterton. He has been so kind.”

Janet could not help observing Mr. Greydon's look of happiness, during his short colloquy with Lord Chesterton, nor the eagerness with which he afterwards advanced to hand her into luncheon. But she had changed in due proportion to the change in him. The time was gone by when she could talk to Rose of her girlish fancy, of her hopes that were more foolish than her fancy, and her certainties that were more visionary than her hopes. From the time that Mr. Greydon really felt for her the preference which she had imagined when it did not exist, the distrust that always accompanies a true love had seized her. She never mentioned his name to her sister, she shunned rather than sought his attentions ; and the more marked they became, the less did she believe they could be intended for her ; and yet she had never been so happy. Home was more prized by her

than ever; her father and mother had, she thought, never been so dear or so kind, and as for Rose, she could not pet her enough. She almost grew fond of Willis, and once suggested that the vulgarity and overbearingness of the Baroness were not quite so great as they had all supposed; but this spark of that general benevolence, which arises from particular happiness, was instantly extinguished by the rest of the family, who still looked on life through its ordinary medium.

Janet sat down to luncheon in a doubtful state of happiness. She saw that something had occurred that excited Mr. Greydon, and gradually went on thinking the worst, till from the frightful supposition that he thought her bonnet unbecoming, she arrived, by various gradations of misfortune, at thinking that he might have announced to Lady Chester his engagement to Miss Simpson, a remarkably plain, *not* young woman, who taught in the Sunday school, and was supposed to be an heiress. She was roused from this reverie, by Lord Chester's rising and saying that he must

propose one health in addition to that of the baby hero of the day, that of the new Rector of Chesford, the Rev. Horace Greydon,"—which announcement was hailed with the most marked approbation by the assembled company.

"Well, old fellow," said Arthur, "I give you joy with all my heart, and I give myself joy too; it will be rare fun having you for a neighbour. I daresay my father never told you that the Rectory is one of the prettiest houses in the neighbourhood."

"I am sure, Mr. Greydon," said Mrs. Hopkinson, "I never was so pleased in my life, what a thing it will be for Chesford to have such a clergyman. It makes me happy to think of it; but what upon earth is to become of us without you, I have not an idea; we shall all turn heathens," and overcome by these adverse ideas, Mrs. Hopkinson fairly burst out crying.

"Pray accept my congratulations," said Sir William de Vesci, drawing Mr. Greydon aside. "It will give Lady Eleanor and my-

self great pleasure to continue the acquaintance so happily begun here. I believe the living is a remarkably good one; but I am afraid you will find coals rather dear, I know Lord Chesterton was giving 28s the ton, when we were giving only 26s, and butcher's meat was dearer the last time I was there, than it was with us, but that might have been accidental. In all other respects it is a delightful residence."

Janet had said nothing, she gave a start when Lord Chesterton announced Mr. Greydon's preferment, and turned pale as she thought "he is going away." She did not know that *his* thought was, "will she go with me?" But the next moment she found that her hand was taken and pressed between his, and though she pretended to believe that she had held it out to him in an attempt to wish him joy—a pleasing persuasion stole over her that her bonnet was not unbecoming, that Miss Simpson was at least five and thirty, and heiress as she was, that Mr. Greydon did not care about her. "At all events," she

thought, "he shews that he looks upon me as a friend, or he would not have shaken hands in that way." And she rose from luncheon in a flutter of happiness and shyness.

"And so you are really all going to-morrow to the Marble Hall fête?" said Blanche, as her guests began to disperse. "That Baroness has conquered at last; I can imagine it must be difficult to withstand that very imperious lady."

"Well," said Mrs. Hopkinson, "I am sure it is the last thing I wish, but John fancies it will be amusing! and then that Miss Monteneros, whom my girls *will* like so much, pressed them to come just to one of their fêtes, and she is so fond of little Charlie, that somehow I can't refuse her—though I did not quite know what she meant by saying it would be 'a tedious brief scene, and very tragical mirth, hot ice and wonderous strange snow.' But Rose says she was only quoting Shakespeare, and, of couse, what Shakespeare

says must be right, and besides, I should like to taste hot ice."

"Are you really going to these Simpsons or Sampsons?" said Harcourt to Rose. "I think it would be good fun to go too, suppose we all go! Arthur, will you come?"

"Oh, no, no," said Blanche, "it is quite impossible! besides, Arthur is not asked happily."

"Oh, that is of no consequence," said Harcourt, "of course, the Sampsons will take our going as a compliment, I don't suppose an invitation is necessary; they are just the sort of people to call us 'swells,' and to think it 'stylish' of us to come uninvited."

"The Baroness gave me some cards for gentlemen," said Mrs. Hopkinson, "I believe she meant one of them for Lord Chester."

"Very likely," said Blanche, "but Mr. Harcourt can have it, Arthur is particularly engaged."

"I should like to go, Blanche."

"Oh no, dearest, you would not; you will be thinking next that you would like to take

me. You should check these wild fancies, Arthur! I am never imaginative myself, am I, Aunt Sarah? Certainly not to the extent of supposing I should like to make acquaintance with Baroness Sampson; but seriously, if you go to her parties, we must ask her to ours, you would not like that?"

"No, decidedly not; I give it up, and Harcourt is 'swell' enough for two."

"Well then, Mrs. Hopkinson, recollect that I go to-morrow under your auspices. I shall have the pleasure of meeting you," Harcourt added in a low voice to Rose, "so it cannot be very tragical mirth to me."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE 'Times' of the following morning announced two more failures of large banking houses, and there were dark hints in the City article about a great capitalist, which were perfectly unintelligible to those who had not been brought up to talk Stock Exchange fluently, but explained by the more learned Willis to allude to Sampson's house. "I fully expect to hear that that fellow has gone off any day, and he will take some of your money with him, Charlie," he said to the little boy, who was sitting on his knee, "I am sorry on your account, but, never mind, we must make the best of it."

The idea of Willis making the best of anything, was so startling, such a very

astonishing novelty, that this announcement was received much as the intimation of a great misfortune would have been from anybody else. The Hopkinsons all looked at him with the greatest commiseration, and with some curiosity, just as people stare when a fresh beast arrives at the Zoological Gardens. A "Willis-making-the-best-of-it," was quite a new specimen, a rare and interesting animal; and when it further appeared, that his black coat had disappeared, and that he was drest like any other commonplace gentleman, in an equally commonplace dark coat, the pity of the family knew no bounds. If he had avowed, that he had lost all his wealth, and was going to hang himself, the girls would have laughed, and said, "how like Charles;" but when he seemed to think that only part of his fortune was at stake, and that, except for Charlie's sake, he did not mean to be miserable about it, they were all in the greatest grief—Captain Hopkinson proffering assistance, Mrs. Hopkinson buried in her pocket handkerchief, and the girls,

under pretence of coaxing Charlie, actually patting Willis on the shoulder, and stroking his hair, and going through all the usual sisterly methods of consolation.

“By the bye, young ladies, I have brought you some parasols suitable for the day,” he said, producing two striking articles of guipure and white silk; “there is a terrible want of shade at Marble Hall, and you will be burnt alive.”

“Really,” said Rose afterwards to her sister, “I thought I should have fainted if I had known how, when Charles gave us those parasols, and seemed to care whether we should be tanned or not. They are exactly like that parasol of Miss Monteneros’ that we admired so much. Janet, he must be in love with Rachel, and all this change is her doing.”

“I should not be surprised,” said Janet shaking her head sagely. “When people are in love, they are so very benevolent, at least, so I have always heard, of course I know nothing about it. But I am sure there

was something very interesting in that long talk he and Rachel had in the garden the other day, Charles has been a different man ever since. But now, Rose, it is time to dress."

When they arrived at Marble Hall, any misgivings as to the Sampson prosperity were quite set at rest. There were more servants in dazzling liveries, a thicker forest of greenhouse plants, more pine-apples, and a greater variety of ices (not hot) than ever. The Baroness wore a gown of such very bright yellow that the sun was affronted and went in. She received her guests with the most painful affability—was so obliged to them for coming—so afraid that they would not be amused, as Mario and Bosio had failed her just at the last moment—and so much distressed that the Baron, who was busy about this tiresome Scotch property, had not yet returned from town, that it seemed difficult to respond to her civilities. She wore a thick fall of lace over her face, on pretence of a bad cold, but even through that and

a still thicker mask of rouge, a keen observer could detect a livid face, blanched lips, and red restless eyes.

Rachel received her two friends with the greatest warmth, and then devoted herself to making Mrs. Hopkinson comfortable ; but not before Willis, hovering in the back-ground, had had the pleasure of seeing his parasols examined and apparently admired, and the unusual cordiality with which Rachel afterwards met him, convinced him that his kindness to his sisters-in-law had given satisfaction to the lady of his love.

“ I can't think what Lady Chester meant,” said Harcourt, joining the two sisters, “ by talking of the Baroness as uncivil and important. I have had considerable difficulty in escaping from her gratitude to me, for honouring her with my presence here to-day, I felt like a Royal Duke, and half expected to hear the band play ‘ God save the Queen,’ as I stepped with much dignity out on the lawn. Now, Miss Rose, shall we go and hear the music in the saloon, which the

Baroness assures me is not unworthy of my notice?"

Whether it were or not, will never be known, for Harcourt and Rose passed the open windows of the saloon, without appearing to perceive the volume of sound that issued from them, and strolled on to a bench in the flower garden, where they seemed to be engaged in earnest conversation. Indeed, Harcourt began their expedition by saying he had something very particular to say. Mr. Greydon asked Janet soon after, if she would not like to follow her sister, and upon her assenting, he led her in an exactly opposite direction. Perhaps, he too had something particular to say.

The sinister whispers respecting the absence of their host, which were beginning to circulate amongst his City friends, were stopped by his sudden appearance. He appeared to have escaped the influenza to which the Baroness attributed her changed appearance, and a veil that should conceal his intelligent eye, intellectual forehead, and general aspect of

benevolence and morality, would have been tantalizing. As usual, he professed inattention to the amusements of the day, and was much occupied in talking over with his moneyed friends the deplorable state of the Corban family, and his intention to organize a subscription for them on a large scale. "Corban may not have had a clear head for business, but I believe, a more honest fellow does not exist, notwithstanding the cry some of his malicious creditors are raising against him. His family are, I am told, in a sad state. There was a talk of bringing out on the stage, that charming Miss Corban, whom you have heard sing at my wife's parties. Now, on the score of morality, I must try to prevent this—her vocal talents, her beauty, her very archness, are all so many snares—I have put down my name for five hundred pounds, and hope to persuade many others to join in this good work. I believe there are sandwiches or some refreshments of that sort in the dining-room; shall we adjourn

there, and after dinner see what can be done for these poor Corbans ?”

And so they all went to the turtle and venison, and pine-apple, that represented sandwiches, and invigorated themselves with a view of being charitable eventually.

Janet and Rose, looking very demure, had rejoined their father and mother ; and of course, by the merest accident, Mr. Greydon and Mr. Harcourt met them struggling through the crowd that was flocking into the dining-room, and offered their services. They found places not very far from the Baron, which was an advantageous position, inasmuch as they could hear an occasional axiom of morality, so well worded that it made an impression on the memory, and might be of use to them for life. His liberality, too, for he was still eager in the cause of the Corbans, was good as an example ; and Janet began to wonder whether a sovereign, the only one she had, might not be offered more as a tribute to the influence of the Baron's example and exhortations, than with any hope of its being of the smallest

use. She doubted, indeed, whether he would know a mere single sovereign by sight, he seemed to deal with them so exclusively by hundreds and thousands.

However, at this moment, it would have been impossible to address him; a letter had been brought to him marked 'Immediate.' He read it with apparent unconcern, but his glasses fell from his hand, as he removed them from his eyes. "Ah, my dear lady," he said, turning to the great lady of the party, who was seated at his right hand. "This is one of the petty torments of age, which you will one day have to endure; I am always losing my spectacles, or dropping my glasses. Do take care of your eyes, mine are quite worn out."

As the friend he addressed was past sixty, and had for some years enjoyed, in the seclusion of home, the comfort of what she called clearers, she was particularly pleased with this little address. The Baroness had seen the letter arrive, and the trivial incident of the falling glasses, perhaps, had a meaning to her, which no one else could attach to it. How

often is the face of the husband, when it seems utterly calm and unmoved to the generality of society, full of strange revelations and terror to the wife who knows its slightest line, its most passing expression. Baroness Sampson saw that, for one moment, her husband's hand had been unnerved, and to her this told all. She passed her handkerchief rapidly over her face, and then suddenly rose from the table. Her pale face and trembling movements, confirming the declaration she made of sudden faintness, she left the room, murmuring that her influenza and the heat of the room had overcome her, and that Rachel must take her place.

The Baron lingered a few minutes, explaining that his wife had been unwell for some days, and then followed to enquire after her, having first requested the company to adjourn to the ball room and begin dancing. He returned shortly, and said that the Baroness was so completely knocked up, he feared she would hardly be able to reappear; and then taking the arm of his son, who had only just

arrived, he sauntered down the garden walk which led to the river, and was seen no more.

The party dispersed soon after, with a vague feeling that "something was wrong," but merely expressing a wish not to disturb their hostess any longer; the Hopkinson ladies had made their retreat as soon as dinner was over. Thanks to Rachel's attention, Mrs. Hopkinson had really been amused. A breakfast of this kind, with bands of music, singing, jugglers, &c., was quite a novelty to her; and she came home in the highest spirits, making the most ample amends to the girls for ever having disliked their friend.

"She is a good, kind-hearted girl as ever lived, and very attentive to her elders, which I look upon as a very fine quality. I have come to the age when I enjoy a little attention from young people. To be sure she says a few odd things, but then I have been thinking that if every body talked in the same way, if they were all as commonplace as I am, for example, it would be very dull, and Miss Monteneros is very amusing; and, my dears, I

am quite sure now, though I did not think so at first, that Charles admires her very much. He was always following us about, and that could not be for my sake, as he sees more than enough of me, and he was so civil and obliging. Well ; she is fond of little Charlie and she will make a good step-mother if he is to have one ; and now here we are at home, and I have not heard a word from either of you. I am afraid you have not been so well amused as I have, and I can't get Willis out of my head, I really think we shall have a wedding soon in the family."

Janet burst out laughing, and Rose began to cry ; and then they changed parts, Janet cried, and Rose laughed, while Mrs. Hopkinson, sinking back in her comfortable chair, and carefully taking off her best bonnet, stared at them with wonder. But the bonnet was twitched out of her hand, and flung irreverently on the floor, and the daughters' arms were clasped round the mother's neck, before she could recover herself enough to speak, while Janet said :

“Mamma, dearest mamma, you talk of one wedding, what would you say to two more? Indeed, we liked the breakfast, and shall like the recollection of it all our lives; mamma, we are both so happy, so very happy, if it were not for the notion of leaving papa and you—Rose is engaged to Mr. Harcourt.”

“And Janet to Mr. Greydon,” added Rose.

“My dear, dear children,” gasped Mrs. Hopkinson, “do stop a minute, I can’t understand these sudden changes. Oh! where is John? He said it would be so, and I thought it was all nonsense; and so you are both engaged, and that dear Mr. Greydon will be our son; such a good man, and we have always looked up to him as something quite above us. And I shall like Mr. Harcourt, Janet, no, Rose, I mean, quite as much when I know him as well. And, my darlings, I will say that for you, that such good daughters will make excellent wives, and I hope you will both be as happy in your married lives as I have been. But I wish John would come

home ; and do, Janet, pick up my bonnet, I shall want it for the wedding, and then both of you sit down and tell me how all this came about, and you may both talk at once this time, though I do not like it in general.”

They availed themselves of this permission, and Mrs. Hopkinson turned from one to the other, sometimes in a state of delight at their prospects, sometimes in a fit of desperation at her own, and finally she sank into a reverie, from which she awoke with a placid smile, saying, “My daughters, Mrs. Greydon and Mrs. Harcourt ; well, if that is not droll ; I had quite forgotten that you were not mere children still. Ah ! there is John at last, how shall we tell him ?”

But there was nothing to tell ; he had been detained by the lovers, not greatly to his surprise, as he had been more observant than his wife of the proceedings of the day, and he walked straight up to his daughters, and, with much emotion, congratulated them affectionately on their happy prospects.

“I assure you,” he said to his wife, when

the girls had withdrawn, " that those are two as fine young men as ever I wish to see ; I had rather a prejudice against Harcourt on account of that crinkum-crankum boat, that he chooses to sport ; but he is really so well aware of Rosy's merits, and so fond of her, that, as there is no room for her in that absurd outrigger, I gave my consent very willingly. He is a liberal fellow. I said that I was afraid they would be disappointed in the portions I could give my daughters ; and Greydon said, that with the excellent living Lord Chesterton had given him, he wanted no more ; and then Harcourt took me aside, and said, that he wished I would add to Janet's share whatever I meant to give to Rose. ' We shall have fortune enough of our own,' Harcourt said, ' and Mr. Greydon will do a great deal of good with the money. It would all go in opera tickets and concerts with me, which are of no earthly use, though very pleasant.' Altogether, Jane, I think we ought to be very thankful to see our two dear children so well settled."

“Yes, my dear, and I am most thankful, but I never was so miserable in all my life. It is all very well for you, John, who are used to be away from them a year at a time ; but they are the daily happiness of my life, and I know you will be going to sea again, and then what is to become of me ?”

“You must go with me, my love,” and there the matter ended for the present ; poor Mrs. Hopkinson being as nearly selfish and fretful as ever she was in her life. She was somewhat consoled by a visit from Lady Chester, who came prepared to hear of great results from the fête, and was not disappointed. And she insisted on Mrs. Hopkinson’s seeing the sunny side of this labyrinth, told her she was the luckiest mother in the world, and laid out a long avenue of grandchildren, leading anywhere but to the possibility of Mrs. Hopkinson’s going off to India. In fact, Lady Chester assured her so solemnly that she had a presentiment that Captain Hopkinson would not go to sea again, that

Mrs. Hopkinson ended by believing her, and gave herself up to be considered singularly fortunate.

CHAPTER XXIII.

JUST as the Hopkinsons had finished breakfast the following morning, they were surprised by an early visit from Willis, who seemed to be in a state of unusual excitement; and instead of the congratulations they had expected, he burst out with something like an oath, adding "And the rascal is actually gone—went off while the dancing was going on; the police were waiting for him at the station, but I suppose he had good intelligence, for he got into a steamer, and has not been heard of since. His precious wife must have feigned that illness, for she is missing too; and now, Mrs. Hopkinson, I want you to do one of your good-natured actions. Marble Hall is full of detectives, and messengers from the

Court of Bankruptcy, and ruined tradesmen ; and that poor girl, Miss Monteneros, is all alone, and I want you—”

“ My dear, don't say another word, I'll go and fetch her. Of course, she must come to us. Dear me ! what a world it is ! nothing but changes, the Sampsons gone off, and John talking of a voyage, and both the girls going to be married.”

“ Yes, I know,” Willis said, “ and I was coming to wish them joy,” and he actually went and kissed his sisters-in-law, and said he was delighted. “ And now, ma'am, are you ready ?” While she went to put on her bonnet, Captain Hopkinson enquired into the probable amount of Willis' own loss. He said that if Baron Sampson's were a mere ordinary bankruptcy, he should lose but a few thousands ; but there were rumours of forgeries to a great extent, and he could not yet know whether he might not be one of the victims. “ Miss Monteneros does not know either, whether her fortune is not gone too.” However, thanks to the blindness of

parents, the Sampsons had always believed that Moses was irresistible, and that Rachel would eventually marry him. Mr. Bolland's advice had averted the danger which she had run, of putting the Baron legally in possession of her fortune, and his ruin had at last been so sudden and so complete, that there had been no time to achieve the fraudulent embezzlement of her property.

Mrs. Hopkinson found the house in great confusion, and full of strange looking men, some trying to seize valuable property which they looked upon as their own, as it had never been paid for—others guarding it for the general benefit of the creditors, and all heaping abuse, in no measured terms, on the head of the plausible swindler. Rachel was in her own room, preparing for departure, but sinking at times into gloomy reveries, which seemed to unfit her for any exertion. She was in one of these fits of exhaustion when Mrs. Hopkinson arrived, and the sight of an honest and friendly face broke up at once the icy gloom that had closed over her.

She burst into a passion of tears, and flinging her arms round Mrs. Hopkinson's neck, she sobbed out, "Ah! I shall be better now, I thought you would come to me."

"Of course, my dear, I am come *to* you and *for* you," said Mrs. Hopkinson cheerfully. "This is no place for you, John will be here directly to take care of your property, and you must come home with me. The girls are getting your room ready, and the sooner we go the better. When did the knowledge of all this come upon you?"

"Not till this morning; I was deceived to the last. After the party was over I went up-stairs to see how my aunt was, and her maid met me and said her lady had such a bad headache she wished to keep quite quiet in her own room. At that moment she must have been on the railroad leaving England for ever. This morning, I found this note on her table, and that is all I know."

"Dear Rachel,

"By a combination of untoward events,

added to the easy credulity of your uncle, who is careless to a fault in money matters, our affairs have become so embroiled that we find it necessary to leave England for a short time. I have no doubt that justice will be done to your uncle, and that we shall soon be enabled to overcome the persecution, for I can call it nothing less, raised by his enemies, and a short tour abroad will not be disagreeable to me. Knowing the uncertainties of a commercial life, the dear good Baron, with his accustomed kindness and *prévoyance*, settled, some time ago, a handsome sum of money on me, payable to my own order, therefore, my dear Rachel, you need not be uneasy lest I should miss any of the luxuries to which I have been accustomed, and which, indeed, are to me, absolutely indispensable. Should I find my own means insufficient, I shall apply to you without scruple, as, thanks to the Baron, you receive your *whole* fortune untouched, therefore I consider that we have some claims on you, though it is not likely we shall be

driven to urge them. I will write from Paris."

"Your affectionate aunt,

"REBECCA, BARONESS SAMPSON."

"And so they are gone to Paris!"

"No," said Rachel with a deep sigh, "that is as false as all the rest. Two servants and some boxes went to Folkestone. My uncle and aunt went, I believe, to Hull, and sailed this morning for Norway. Mrs. Hopkinson, let me tell you all the truth at once; as my relations, I feel deeply the disgrace that has fallen on them, the misery, the wide spread ruin they have brought on others; but as friends, I cannot affect to regret them. The Baroness is my mother's only sister; I would have loved her, if she would have let me, in the very young days when my affections were warm—but it was impossible. There was nothing genial in her treatment of me, nothing true in her intercourse with others; I cannot tell you how artificial, how mean, with all its splendour, our life was. She has

made me what I am—cold, distrustful, unloved and unloving; but at least I am not false.”

“No, my dear, that you certainly are not; I should say that, if anything, you were disposed to err the other way, to speak unpleasant truths, for fear you should not speak the truth at all.”

“It may be so,” said Rachel dejectedly, “I certainly do not make myself generally liked. There is one truth more, I must tell you before I enter your house, perhaps you will think it as unpleasant as all the others. One person in the world really does like me, at least, so he says, and that is your son-in-law; and as my presence in your house might lead to constant meetings with him, or might interfere with your comfort, should he wisely stay away, I feel you ought to know this before I accept your friendly offer. Now you know it, do you still choose to have me?”

“Of course I do, my dear child, all the more for the confidence you have shown me. I am sure I wish with all my heart you

would marry Charles, and take little Charlie under your care, for goodness knows what will become of him if I have to go to foreign parts with John ; and Willis has a great deal of good in him, if he had not got into such foolish habits of grumbling and groaning ; but we think he is very much improved lately, and what is more, we think it is your doing—so there you see, my dear, everybody can be useful somehow, and now come home. How pleased Charlie will be !”

And Charlie became more than ever the charm and interest of Rachel’s life. She entered warmly into the happiness of Janet and Rose, but she had little of their society. Mr. Greydon and Mr. Harcourt were always coming and going, and walking and talking, and Rachel looked on with amusement at the sight of four people foolishly and heartily in love. It was a new spectacle to her, and she thought it very entertaining, but rather incomprehensible.

However, she made herself extremely useful, especially in the matter of the trousseaux, not

only by her advice and good taste, but by the magnificence of her contributions. In vain did Mrs. Hopkinson remonstrate, Rachel only laughed and she said she knew best what Mrs. Greydon ought to wear when she dined at Chesterton Castle, and what Mrs. Harcourt would want when the regiment was quartered at Windsor, and she must request Mrs. Hopkinson not to interfere.

Willis was much occupied at this time by the settlement of his affairs with the assignees of the Sampson house; but he often passed his evenings with his relations, and Rachel could not but see that his interest in her increased rather than diminished. The only time in which he accidentally saw her alone, he thanked her for her care of Charlie, and said he knew she would be glad to hear that his losses by the bankruptcy did not exceed the £10,000 which he had advanced to the Baron, and which, for some time, he had given up as a bad debt. Rachel looked distressed and ashamed; and became still more confused, when he added that he did not mean

to importune her with a repetition of his former declaration, however much his attachment might have strengthened—but he hoped she saw that her advice had not been thrown away, and that, at least, she no longer looked upon him as artificial and untrue.

“I hope we are both improved, and improving,” she said kindly. “Who could do otherwise under the influence of these good-hearted people,” and then she turned the conversation on the Hopkinsons, and the approaching marriages.

It had been her intention to settle herself at the sea-side after a fortnight’s stay at Pleasance ; but Janet and Rose dwelt with such melancholy energy on the loneliness of their parents, and the comfort that she would be to their mother after they were gone, that she consented to stay till the return of the Harcourts from their wedding tour. Janet would not be able to leave Chesford, but Rose would then be within reach of Dulham ; perhaps in her heart, Rachel dreaded to begin

her lonely life, and clung to the kindness she met with at Pleasance.

Aileen's wedding was the first of the three that took place; but as an accurate account of it may be read in any number of the 'Court Journal,' no description is required of it here. There is a frightful sameness in all those great weddings, but the day itself was propitious to the Hopkinsons. Their star was evidently on the ascendant this year. The Duke of St. Maur had engaged in one of those little light speculations, with which people of colossal fortune are apt to amuse themselves, sometimes to the ruin, sometimes to the improvement of their overgrown incomes. He was muddling away two or £300,000 in making a pier and a harbour on the coast of a county, half of which, at least, was his property. The agent in charge of these works had died suddenly; and when the Duke mentioned, incidentally, the difficulty he had to find a trustworthy successor, it occurred to Arthur that Captain Hopkinson would be just the person for the

situation. At Aileen's wedding, Arthur had an opportunity of introducing his friend to the Duke, who was much pleased with his intelligence, and frank gentlemanlike manner. The harbour works were such as Captain Hopkinson was peculiarly fitted to undertake, and after due inquiries and references, the offer was made and accepted, and Captain Hopkinson became the Duke's Agent for the Pier and Harbour of Seaview, with a good house and handsome salary.

“Well! there never were such fortunate people as we are,” said Mrs. Hopkinson. “There we shall be *at* the sea, which will make John happy, and not *on* it which will make me the same—plenty to do, and of course, if any of you want change of air or sea-bathing, there you will be at once! To be sure how things do come about, just from a little neighbourliness and kind feeling. For this is all the doing of that dear kind Lord and Lady Chester. If Lord Chester had not been so well cared for by John, he would have died, and there would have been no

Lady Chester; and if I had not stepped out in that blessed shower, with my great umbrella, she would never have known that I was John's wife, or anything but a vulgar old woman, which to be sure, I am; but I shall always think I saved that precious baby's life in that bad confinement of hers. And then if she had been grand and fine, she never would have brought my girls so forward; but she made as much of them as if they were Duke's daughters, and that has ended in Harcourt's marrying Rose; and she got that living for Greydon, without which he could not have married Janet; and now by Lord Chester's introducing John to the Duke, he has got that good appointment. There never was anything like it, well! after to-morrow, when my poor darlings are married and gone, I shall have time to sit down and think it all over, and be thankful. At present, I think I should rather like a good cry."

The weddings of Janet and Rose took place in the quiet little church at Dulham;

there was no grand breakfast, no great gathering of mere acquaintances, no long speeches—but there were a few warm friends, much affection, hearts that responded warmly to the vows that were made solemnly, and a bright promise of happiness. Then came the hurried parting, and all was over, and they were gone.

“Oh! Rachel, my dear,” said the weeping mother, “you are almost another daughter to me. I wish you could make up your mind to marry Willis, and take my Mary’s place, and then you would belong to us, and we should all be settled like the people at the end of a play. Could you not just fall in love with him?”

“Quite impossible, my dear Mrs. Hopkinson, and no blame to Mr. Willis; I do not believe it is in my power to fall in love with anybody.”

“Then, my dear, you may just as well marry him as another. I think with you, that you are not like my foolish children, capable of being desperately in love; but

then Willis is very much in love with you, and I almost think it is better that the love should be most on the husband's side; and then he is afraid of you, and that is not amiss when the wife is cleverer than the husband. You are always telling me you want to make up to Charlie the loss that you think your uncle has inflicted on him. Depend upon it, Willis will not take a farthing of your money, unless he takes you with it, Rachel," added Mrs. Hopkinson in a quivering voice. "I see now why my poor Mary was not quite happy with him; he married her because he thought it convenient to have a wife, who would do just what he liked, and have no will of her own, but he never cared for her, and admired her as he does you. If he marries you, it is because he worships the ground you tread on, because he looks up to you as much as he looked down on her—because, in short, he has found out that there is something that he loves better than himself."

The effect of this exhortation cannot be

known. The Chesters are departing to Chesterton Castle, the Hopkinsons hurrying off to Seaview. The scene is changed, the actors dispersed, but with a pleasing certainty that between Chesterton, Seaview, and Chestford they will constantly meet again; but Pleasance is deserted, and once more there may be seen in the third column of the fourth page of the "Times" the old advertisement.

Dulham.—To be let, a Semi Detached House.

The book is completed
And closed like the day,
And the hand that has written it,
Lays it away.

Postscript. Unfortunately the hand that has laid it away, is obliged to take it up again. From the great importance of the events it contains, immediate publication was, of course, imperative, and the fate of one who played a great part in the history was left undecided; but we have just received the following Telegram.

From Our Special Dulham correspondent.

Dulham, 5.50 Saturday.

Willis has been accepted, and is in high spirits.

THE END.

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